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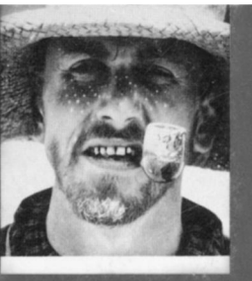

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Ernest Callenbach

The Unbearable Lightness of Leaving

For the past fifteen years, I have been leading a double life. By day, I've served as Editor of this journal, which I founded in 1958, and I've also edited the line of film books published, like the journal, by the University of California Press. But by night and on weekends, I have been writing and lecturing in an entirely different field: ecology. Most people in the film world have no inkling that to another community I'm known as the author of the novel *Ecotopia*, which has sold about 600,000 copies in eight languages. And people concerned with ecology are astonished to learn that I also edit a respectable magazine of film criticism.

There is actually one connection that has kept this double life from being truly schizoid: movies are about seeing, and *Ecotopia* is an attempt to see, in quite a literal way, what a world run on ecological rather than economic first principles might look like. (And yes, there is a script, and against all the usual odds it still might someday get produced.) But there has still been a severe strain involved, and when the University offered early-retirement inducements to its staff and faculty I decided the time had come to concentrate my energies on ecological matters and turn both the film-book line and *Film Quarterly* over to other hands.

A book publisher's life is full of meetings, financial plans, and an endless chivying of projects through the complexities of large organizations. *Film Quarterly*, by contrast, was my own fief; it had to be, since there was no money to pay anybody else for editorial duties. The reward for the resulting arduousness was a rare kind of independence. Nonetheless, it's exhilarating to think that I will now be able to read whatever I feel like, without any nagging worries whether it's useful for editorial tasks. I will even be able to see movies without ulterior motives, as I loved to do in my first rush of youthful enthusiasm for the art. And as I travel on ecological errands, I will still count on dropping in at the cinematheques in Copenhagen or Vienna or Jakarta, where *Film Quarterly* has been welcomed warmly for so many decades.

But I leave with great regrets. The editing of a journal, at least as I have tried to do it, is an enterprise involving deep attachments—not only to the art itself but just as much to the writers, board members, regional editors, and fellow friends of film (including some distributors and exhibitors) who have over these long, long years so devotedly contributed their talents and their concern to the journal. Despite my ruthless editorial pencil I am at heart a sentimental creature, and as I think back over the many people who have mattered in the little universe of *Film Quarterly* I am deeply touched by the solidarity of our tribe. May it long endure.

The evolution of *FQ* has of course paralleled that of serious thinking about film. In the beginning, our contributors were mostly film-wise journalists and a few people in the film-producing world. We confronted an uncertain future; in 1958, film was in something of a doldrums, with the energy of the fifties running down in Hollywood and the French New Wave and cinéma vérité nowhere yet in sight. At that time, perhaps two dozen people taught film in colleges or universities in the U.S. (aside from film-production courses). The number of nontrivial film books could still be counted on the fingers. But gradually, centers of film teaching expanded and it became more respectable, even academically trendy, to think and write about the medium. Over the years, some of our journalist contributors got academic jobs, and a

new generation of bright and ambitious younger people arrived on the scene, eager to make film an academic specialty like any other. They began turning out lots of books—some brilliant, some tedious, some dreadful, though the majority were, and are, what university presses like to call, with careful neutrality, "useful works." There was now a "field," to which budgets and jobs became attached, and the centripetal forces endemic to American university life began to take their toll: departmentalization, specialization, and a certain chronic intellectual caution. But some members of this new generation were also interested in reaching beyond the academy to a wide group of intelligent moviegoers, and they wrote for us, and still do, relishing the opportunity to reach our audience of 7,000-odd film enthusiasts.

I surely lack a detached perspective, but it seems to me that while the handling of film in the journal has over the years become in some ways more sophisticated and knowledgeable, it has managed to maintain its essential appeal to nonspecialist readers, just as a literary magazine aims to reach a wide group of people concerned with literature. We occupy, along with *Cineaste*, a niche midway between the esoteric scholarly journals and the movie-fan magazines—a niche that suits the broad educational mission of a university press.

Editing is strange work, partly because it requires a taste (not always benign!) for operating behind the scenes, submerging the visible self. I have found it congenial, perhaps because I always preserved, since well before *Ecotopia*, a freelance outside life as a writer, which offered plenty of room for the deployment of ego. There is a certain pleasure in the craft of helping to make a piece of writing just as tight, subtle, and effective as it can possibly be. I am grateful for having been taught (though rather aridly) the analytic skills prized at the University of Chicago, for they gave me an acquaintance with cogency and rigor in writing very useful to a working editor. Author and editor share, as I tried to describe in a novel in dialogue called *Publisher's Lunch*, an unusual and often highly charged bond. This bond sometimes permits reworking of a manuscript in ways that without such shared commitment could be considered savage. But, like some other collective or collegial activities, this mutual devotion to a task can be deeply satisfying, and editors who truly enjoy it may not be quite as selfless as outsiders (or even writers) take them to be. And there is, of course, another level of ego involved, the one on which I have always operated with a very simple and secret editorial agenda: "No bullshit!"

This is never easy when one is running a critical magazine, especially if your writers are increasingly university people. Academics are, in my experience, more prone than most writers to the idea that they alone can discern truth and convince other people of it and they consequently tend to undervalue delight, poesy, feeling, and a judicious sense of the comic limits of human endeavor. Moreover, if they discover that their labors have not produced as much truth as they anticipated, they may become depressed or vindictive. For myself, I am perfectly satisfied to read an account of someone's thoughts and feelings about a film if the operations of the writer's mind are lively, informed, and interesting enough. To an editor, quality of mind is a virtue *sine qua non*. Critical writing may not involve objectively verifiable truth, but there is a kind of internal truth—to the thought and feeling being expressed—that can be achieved in it, just as in fiction and poetry.

It is considered a fatal insult these days to call a piece of writing "impressionistic," but I notice that the charge is usually leveled by people who have difficulty conveying their impressions of anything and prefer to take refuge in the clanging of abstractions against one another. It is much harder, after all, to produce writing that delights with its relevance to human experience than it is to make pseudo-scientific assertions that, however fashionable, are almost certainly wrong. I hope that more writers will rise to that challenge—and publish in *FQ*.

Oddly, films do not seem to delight a lot of the new people in the field; it is ideas that delight them. Some of this curious falling-off of affect about the art is, I think, part of a general cultural malaise, a legacy of our living at the end of a period of mindless and unsustainable industrial expansion and having no sense of what might come next; as at *FQ*'s beginning, it is unclear what, if any, new directions the art may take. But much of the loss of intensity is probably due simply to the fact that so many people now experience film

chiefly on video screens. It is hard to condemn a technology that makes thousands of films available in places unable to support a decent movie theater and that may even, through its effects on dispersing movie financing, make possible occasional small-budget and innovative films which would otherwise never get made. But of the vast range of pleasures that good films offer, only a few—chiefly the verbal and psychological, as opposed to the visual and kinetic—transmit well through this "domestic appliance," as Grierson so mercilessly called it. Small wonder, then, that films experienced on the 19" diagonal and in bizarre colors (or worse yet, colorized) do not command much passionate personal allegiance. They seem mere sociological phenomena, more important in the statistical mass than as individual works, no single one notably more worthy of attention than any other, and suitable for analysis only as exemplars of grand social processes. They become grist for "theory."

This is an age when the illusions of progress are not faring too well. But it has always been tricky, in any humanities field, to speak of progress. For here we lack systematic reality-checks for assertions, such as prevail in science, and most innovating effort goes into what we might call "new formulations"—which generally turns out to mean naming and renaming things in hopes of affecting how other people think about them. There is of course a sense in which this continual turnover of nonprovable understandings is crucial for any society; I'm not saying that it is unnecessary or unimportant or uninteresting, for it is a crucial instrument of the social relationships we maintain with each other.

But it seems important to me to keep in mind that in the humanities and social "sciences" what is at stake is merely power—and influence—concerning how we talk and think about things, while it is the province of science to try and say how things actually work, whatever people may think and say about them. (I am not suggesting either that scientists are somehow outside the ideological struggles of their times, or that science is not often corrupted, but only that its basic functions are different. If you really want to do science about the media, you get *The Journal of Communications*.) But that is not what the humanities are about.

In film history, and this is perhaps one of its newfound appeals, we can point to a steady accumulation of information and occasionally testable propositions about that information—work that has become increasingly sophisticated about the historical record, historiographic methodologies, and the social context of film-making and film viewing. But it is difficult for me to be impressed with the lasting value of the burst of theoretical energy that attended the diffusion of semiotics, structuralism, deconstructionism, etc. Some people think that *FQ*'s original resistance to the kind of theoretical articles that had no films mentioned in them stemmed from a view that theoretical writers were incapable of writing readable English. Many of them were; but my own reservations, at least, were broader than that. Too much of the work that proclaimed its theoretical status remained manifestly theological and sectarian. "Theory" without testable propositions is like a runner with one leg; it isn't going to win any races. What it can do, and did, is to serve as a rallying call for bands of collaborators (some said "gangs"). Thus it served the usual purposes, which I regard as neither good nor evil—though often risible—of our mildly territorial species.

It seems especially obvious that thinking which is even modestly "theoretical" cannot be carried out in ignorance of practice, and one of my fond hopes for the journal's future is that to some degree it can put film-makers and critical people back into the same universe of discourse—as *FQ* sometimes managed in the beginning. Popular journalists are too often sycophantic toward film-makers—especially directors—and critics need to preserve their independence, but this shouldn't mean isolation; an understanding of movies demands some practical acquaintance with how they are made and the people who make them—people whose ideas can be, in my experience, just as intelligent and rather more ardent than those heard in faculty lounges. The widespread disdain among academics for working commercial film-makers is ludicrous. And the gulf that exists within film departments between the production and criticism people should trouble both sides. Whatever theory can do, it can surely do better with a decent acquaintance with practice, and practice could be stimulated by at least rudimentary knowledge of critical issues.

I allow myself a bit of autobiography here—partly out of principle, for people writing about film should more often let their readers know how they got to that place, confronting that film, with those feelings. I grew up in a poor village in central Pennsylvania, a village so small that the nearest movie theater was four miles away, and I thus came to a love for film only in my college years. It's difficult to convey to today's young people, saturated with media of every kind, that film to an 18-year-old at the University of Chicago could seem an overwhelmingly exciting art form. Our little dedicated crew in the Documentary Film Group—a self-propelled student organization that showed *everything*, not just documentaries—devoured the films available on 16mm in every distributor catalog we could get hold of, as if they were holy writ and our souls depended on it. It did not endear us to most of our professors that films mattered to us more than Aristotle or Plato (despite his famous cave), more than Freud or Darwin, more than quantum theory. The University consigned our office to a black-painted basement in one of the dormitories, but we carried on with defiant energy. (Last year, I happened to be invited back to the University, to lecture on ecological matters, and my talk was scheduled in the very same classroom that Docfilm had used for its screenings. Docfilm showings now are in a fancy theater donated by Max Palevsky, and Docfilm members find themselves in the exhibition business. But in Soc. Sci. Room 122 absolutely nothing had changed, and I assume the ghosts of Chaplin, Keaton, and Eisenstein still hover there.)

If any young people coming into film study today have this kind of quasi-subversive passion, it has escaped my notice. (Students in the production departments mostly seem to want to become George Lucas or Stephen Spielberg.) They avoid admitting great affection for any movie, as if it might be held against them later by someone in a position to give or withhold a job. Many academic fields are far more joyless than film (economics and political science, to name only two), but if I am granted a farewell wish, it is that young people should take film with greater *personal* seriousness.

Dare one say it? Great movies are a fit object for love, respect, even veneration. They are creative marvels made not by social processes but by human beings, and they are viewed by other human beings who feel compelled to talk about them as part of their lives as well as expressions of social forces. Criticism (or "theory") that loses sight of these things inevitable degenerates into mandarin specialism and irrelevance. I have heard film academics remark disparagingly that someone's writing was "outside the Discourse." Well, so in their time were Freud's, and Buddha's, and that of most other thinkers who matter. And what if the Discourse itself becomes smug, ingrown, functionally reactionary despite radical terminology?

I am, of course, what Sheldon Renan once called a FOOF—a Friend of Old Films. And because my work in *FQ* has spanned the rise to dominance of television and video, I want to speculate a bit about the future of film as an art. Already, to most young people, film is a mere appendage to video, and even video games. What literally occupies their minds, and gives them to understand what it is to be human, comes from the tube—together with increasingly vestigial input from family and school. Film for them is too marginal an experience to offer itself as a thing of visual beauty or transforming power; video is where everything is happening, and they accept it unquestioningly in a way impossible for those of us who spent a lot of our time in theaters. What the experimental film-maker Bruce Baillie once told me would make no sense to them: that he had decided to make films that were little dramas and would do so using video "because it will keep me from trying to make it beautiful."

We all take it that video is getting better. I happened to see Sony High Definition TV on display recently: an image about four feet wide and maybe two and a half feet high. A placard declared that its quality equalled that of 35mm film, but to the eyes it was plain that HDTV still has a long way to go to fulfill that rash claim; for instance, it cannot resolve interlocking tree branches in the middle distance. While markedly better than ordinary broadcast TV, it is only perhaps as good as Super-8 film or a bad 16mm print.

In principle, however, given enough broadcast bandwidth or massive enough tape drives, there is nothing to prevent video using far more bits of information—enough to actually approach 35mm film definition in an image perhaps five

times as large as the Sony demonstration. (People already do something like this in special-effects production.)

It is conceivable, therefore, that the present aesthetic divide between film and video will converge—a consummation perfectly okay by me for certain purposes. The distribution and exhibition of new or old films via such video would approach the film experience fairly closely. Yes, the colors would still be phosphoric, though improved; the blacks would still not be as black as film's; the luminosity of the image would still have a different feel. But it could equal the definition, size, and dynamism of the film image, and surpass it in sound quality (given good original materials). With its portability and transmissibility, it could reach both home and public venues. This might check the shrinkage of narrative art away from public spaces—and help preserve comedy, that most precious aspect of cinema. It could perhaps prevent film's becoming, like theater, an art that can flourish only in major metropolitan centers and on college campuses, and usually even there only with philanthropic support. Sometimes, after all, the devil offers the best deal you can get. The art might live.

In the very first issue of *Film Quarterly*, I prevailed on Gavin Lambert, former editor of our big-sister magazine *Sight and Sound*, to write a piece for us. He called it "Good-bye to Some of All That," since by then he had crossed the fateful divide from critical work to the writing of Hollywood scripts. But he joined and remained on the editorial board for several years, and I will follow his example by sitting at least for a while on the *FQ* board myself, trying to make myself useful to the new Editor, Ann Martin. Many readers and contributors will recognize her name; she has worked in journalism (at *American Film* magazine and *The New Yorker*), in film-book publication (she originated the American Film Institute Monograph Series), and in film and video production. She knows and respects the academic community, but thinks of herself, I suspect, as the representative of those nonspecialist readers who come to *FQ* with a passion for film and a taste for clear thinking and good writing. I am already looking forward to the lively materials she will be bringing into *FQ*'s pages. As before, *Film Quarterly* will keep wending its way over the dark fields of the republic, bringing our faithful readers enlightenment and sometimes, I hope, surprise and even outrage.

So, giddy at my new freedoms, as well as slightly snuffly with nostalgia, I take my leave of the editorial responsibilities that have been such a large part of my life. I do so remembering the reaction of my then three-year-old daughter when, after nine months of worried preparation, I brought the first small-format issue home and proudly showed it to her. A faint shadow of sibling rivalry crossed her usually cheery face. "So that's your baby magazine," she said, with guarded enthusiasm. And so it was. But now, having grown up, it enters a new phase of its life, as do I.

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Charles Shiro Tashiro

Videophilia

What Happens When You Wait for It on Video

Since the early 1980s, there has been a steady increase in the revenue generated by marketing of theatrical films on videocassette and disc. This mass dissemination has been a boon to those interested in close study of film texts as well as to those simply interested in owning a copy of their favorite films. However, this apparent windfall has usually been embraced with little attention to the technical issues raised by the movement of a text from one medium to another or to the consequences of film evaluation based on video copies.

This discussion is meant as a broad overview of home video, and much of it is relevant to both videocassette and videodisc. However, I have concentrated on the latter, since it has evolved into the "quality" video medium, with a greater focus on duplicating the cinematic experience and an increased sensitivity to the technical requirements of film. (As a former producer for the Criterion Collection, including their edition of *Lawrence of Arabia*, I have some insight into the factors that go into disc production.) In particular, more attention to visual matters has popularized the transfer of wide-screen films at full horizontal width, with the resulting "letterbox" shape.[1] Videodisc publishers' attempted fidelity to film originals, the theoretical problems raised by such an attitude, and its relevance to film viewing and analysis are the focus of this paper.

The Videodisc Medium

To some extent, videodiscs would appear to be the film enthusiast's dream come true. They are light, portable, easy to store. With the growth of the market, a larger catalogue of titles is available.[2] While not cheap, the retail price is well below fees for print rental, not to mention the astronomical sums for purchase. Moreover, discs are (at least in theory) permanent, unlike either videotape or film, which deteriorate with each use.

Film never wears out faster than when run through a flatbed editing machine, the condition best suited for close analysis. Videotape offers fast-forward and rewind, but is much slower than the nearly instantaneous access available with videodisc players. Consumer level VCRs, in addition, cannot offer the true freeze frame that a CAV videodisc offers. Disc players can also interact with computers and offer higher picture resolution than most commercially available tape gauges.[3] And there is, finally, the greater attention paid to the video transfer true of at least some videodisc publishers.

Still, with videodiscs there are trade-offs and underlying ideological assumptions. For example, unlike compact audiodisc players (a related technology), which usually have a feature to play songs in random order, videodisc players cannot randomly "scramble" the chapter encoding included on some discs. Presumably this lack of scrambling ability is based on the assumption that the film viewer will not be interested in mixing up the linear flow of the narrative. The players also do not have a feature to play sound at anything other than regular speed, which obviously assumes that only the picture is worthy of multispeed analysis.[4]

These features are designed into (or out of) the medium. Some are more beneficial to the user than others; all are ideologically dictated. But the limitations of the machinery itself and the assump-

tions that go into its design must be considered (if only in the background) in any discussion of the use of discs for pedagogical, analytical, or substitute cinematic viewing purposes. We must also consider the strategies of *moving* the text from film to video.

Transfer/Translation

The term "film-to-video" transfer is itself an ideological mask. Its connotation of neutral movement from one location (projection in a theater) to another (viewing at home) hides the reconfiguration of the text in new terms. A more accurate expression would be "translation," with its implicit admission of a different set of governing codes. While film and video share common technical concerns (contrast, color, density, audio frequency response, etc.), their means of addressing those concerns differ. The conscientious film-to-video transfer is designed to accentuate the similarities and minimize the differences, but the differences end up shaping the video text.

We might call the ease of translating a particular film to video its "videobility." A film with high videobility translates relatively easily, perhaps even gaining in the process. (Which is to say that there are elements in the *film* that come through more clearly on video. Subtlety of performance, intricacy of design, for example, may be lost in the narrative drive of the one-time-only cinematic setting, but enhanced at home.) A film of low videobility translates with more difficulty. There are two components to videobility: technical and experiential. Technical differences of image between film and video center around three issues: 1) brightness and contrast range, 2) resolution, and 3) color.[5] As for the sound, a sound track mixed for theatrical exhibition may, when transferred to video, have tracks that will not balance "properly" at home. (For example, dialogue tracks may be drowned out by ambience tracks, etc.)[6]

Consider the following hypothetical example. A young couple, with their baby daughter, sits next to a window covered by horizontal blinds. Next to the window is an open doorway, leading out into a garden ripe with daffodils in summer sunlight. A butterfly flits across the flowers, attracting the attention of the baby, dressed in a bright red dress.

Lawrence of Arabia: the full 70mm CinemaScope frame

She toddles out into the sun to chase the butterfly as her parents remain in the alternating shadows and shafts of light caused by the horizontal blinds. The mother looks at the father, then says "I think it's time we called it quits" at just the moment their daughter, as she reaches for the butterfly, trips and falls giggling into the flowers.

As we work to translate this image into video, problems arise immediately. First, there is the brightness range between the garden in sunlight and the parents in shade. Film records this juxtaposition without difficulty. But as the telecine operator exposes the video for the father and mother, the baby, butterfly, and flowers disappear into a white blaze; correcting for the baby, the parents disappear into murky shadow.

A choice has to be made, but which is more important? Attention to narrative would dictate exposing for the most significant action. Reasoning that the overall film is about the couple's divorce, the operator decides that the line "I think it's time we called it quits" is more important and thus chooses to expose for the interior. The baby's giggle seems to come out of nowhere; even if the juxtaposition between the line and the baby's giggling were not there, letting the flowers go to blazes runs the risk of losing the sensual detail. This detail

may not *dominate* a film, but its cumulative effect is certainly a powerful influence on our perception.

The operator decides to make an overall adjustment in contrast to bring all the brightness ranges into midrange, thus making the image more "acceptable" to video. As a result, the alternating light and shadow are readable as a pattern and the baby in the flowers reappears out of the white sun.

Just about everything is visible now, but the sacrifice has been to change all the tonal values into the middle greys. Vividness of color and detail are lost, and the image looks as if it's been washed with a dirty towel. (As an example of just such a "dirty towel" transfer, see the video release of Joseph Losey's *Don Giovanni*.) The video image is acceptable within the limitations of the medium but unsatisfactory as a reproduction of the film image. In other words, the overall contrast of the image can be "flattened" to conform to the technical limitations of video, but the visual impact has been flattened as well. Thus, films photographed in a low-key or contrasty manner might be said to have low videobility because of the difficulty in reproducing their visual styles.

But there is another problem with our scene. The horizontal blinds read perfectly well on film because of its resolving power. But on video, they produce a distracting dance as the pixels inadequately resolve the differences between the blinds and intervening spaces. In other words, film can read the interstices between the blinds and reproduce that difference; video, trying to put both the blind and the space into the same pixel, cannot. (This is why TV personalities do not wear clothing with finely detailed weave or patterns.) The only way to compensate for this "ringing" effect is to throw the image slightly out of focus.

The resolving power of the film image is almost always greater than that of video. It is this greater resolution that enables the film image to be projected great distances. It is also this resolution that allows the greater depth and sensory detail that we associate with the filmgoing experience. Therefore, a film dependent on the accumulation of fine details also has low videobility. (For example, in the MGM/UA letterboxed video release of *Ben Hur*'s chariot race, the thousands of spectators become a colorful flutter; the spectacle of *Lawrence of Arabia* is also significantly reduced by the low resolution of background detail.)

And what about color? Although photography and video color reproduction are fundamentally different (one is a subtractive process, the other additive), it is the limitations of the video image that present the greatest problems, particularly the handling of saturated reds. Too vibrant or dense, and the signal gets noisy. But since red is often used to attract attention, it cannot be muted too much in video without violating visual design. Thus, color balance on the baby's dress would have to be performed carefully to allow the red to "read" without smearing. (For examples of dissonant reds, see Juliet's ball dress in the Paramount Home Video release of Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*; also note the scenes inside HAL's brain in the MGM/UA release of *2001: A Space Odyssey*.)

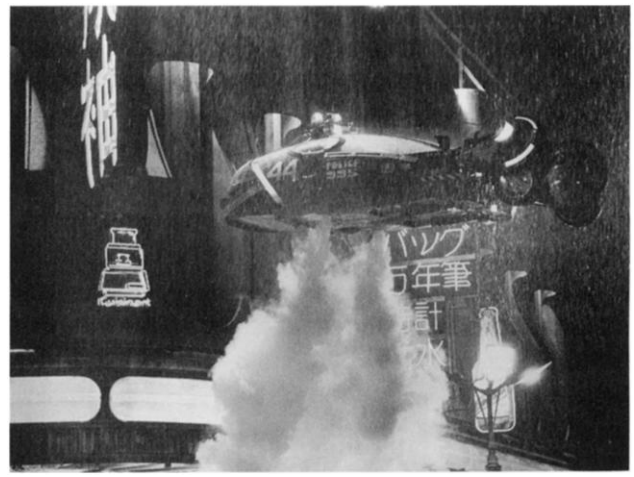
On the other hand, the relative imprecision of video does have some advantages, or, at least, it can be exploited. For example, optical effects in film, such as dissolves, "announce" themselves because of a noticeable shift in visual quality as the optical begins. This shift results from the loss of a generation involved in the production of the optical effect. To some extent, because the video image lacks the same resolution, the differences between the first-generation film image and the

second-generation optical image can be lessened. In effect, the difference takes advantage of video's inferior resolving power to make the first-generation image look more like the second-generation image.

There are other problems, though, that result indirectly from the relatively low fidelity of the video image when compared with the high-fidelity sound reproduction possible with only a modest home stereo. Classical narrative is structured on the notion of synchronization between image and sound. This synchronization has a temporal component: we expect words to emerge from lips at the moment they form the letters of those words; when a bomb goes off, we expect to hear an explosion, etc. But there is also a *qualitative* component to synchronization. A big image of an explosion should be loud; a disjuncture occurs if the audio "image" remains large when that big image is reduced to a small screen. Imagine attending the opera and sitting in the last row of the upper balcony but *hearing* the music as if sitting in orchestra seats.

Home stereo is not equal to a theater. But subjectively, it is much closer in effect to the theatrical experience than a television image is to a projected film image. Moreover, when the sound tracks maintain some aspects of theatrical viewing/hearing that are easy to maintain in audio but impossible to duplicate in picture, we're once again conscious of the differences, not only between picture and sound, but between video and film. For example, in the opening scene of *Blade Runner*, a spinner (flying car) appears in the background, flies toward the foreground, then disappears camera left. As it retreats into the distance behind us, the sound continues (at least in those theaters equipped with surround stereo), fading into the distance, even though the image is no longer on the screen.

When this effect is duplicated in the Criterion Collection's letterboxed edition of the film, the audio decay of the spinner goes on too long or not long enough, depending on where you've placed your speakers. While the speakers can be moved, doing so runs the risk of throwing *other* sounds out of "synch." Even if it doesn't affect other sounds, however, the labor of moving speakers around for each viewing session takes the home video experience a long way from the passive enjoyment of sitting in a darkened theater, allowing yourself to be worked over by sight and sound.



A spinner in *Blade Runner*

"Improving" the film original by correcting optical effects, "fudging" the video when it can't handle the superior resolving power of film images, "flattening" the contrast ratio in order to produce an image that registers some version of the information contained in the original, together with audio that by its technical superiority reinforces our awareness of the video image—at what point do these differences produce a product no longer a suitable signifier of the film signified? Colorizing, for example, while damned as an obvious distortion of the film, can also be defended as improving the original. Is the conscientious transfer any less of a distortion? Preserving the "original" film text may prove as elusive a goal as the "unobtrusive" documentary camera.

The Disintegrating Text: Videodiscs as Classical Ruins

Reconstructions of ancient architecture can be attempted from the fragments scattered across a landscape. But a rebuilt Parthenon is still a product of the archaeology that researched it. Videocassettes and discs are like large shards—hints of the original. But discs are not just the ruins of their forebears, they are the guns that destroy the temple by taking the archaeological process further, breaking the flow of a film into sides, segmenting the programming into "chapters," halting it alto-

gether with freeze frames, encouraging objective analysis.

Film viewing, of course, is not genuinely continuous, since a feature film is divided into several reels. The theatrical experience, however, represses the disruption of reel breaks by quick changeovers of projectors, producing an illusion of continuous action. Videotape maintains that flow, at least for average length films. Discs cannot,[7] and publishers are thus faced with the problem of where to break the narrative. The decisions are governed by two concerns: 1) length limitations of the side—one hour for a CLV (Constant Linear Velocity) disc, 30 minutes for a CAV (Constant Angular Velocity) disc, and 2) suitability of the break.

Choice of breaks is not as simple as it might seem. For example, with a 119-minute film, it is not just a matter of putting 60 minutes on one side, and 59 minutes on another. If the 60-minute mark occurs in the middle of dialogue or a camera movement, then the break has to be pushed back to the previous cut. If there's an audio carryover over that cut (particularly a music cue), then other problems arise. If aesthetic considerations suggest going back before the 59-minute mark, it will no longer be possible to fit the film on a single disc, which means a rise in production costs. Faced with such an alternative, aesthetic considerations become secondary. (For example, consider the break between sides one and two on the Criterion CAV *Lawrence of Arabia*, which occurs in the middle of a dissolve between Lawrence and Tafas in the desert and their retrieval of water from a well. This break subverts the linkage function of a classical dissolve, here intended to bridge two disparate times and locations. On the disc, the desert and the well remain distant, separated by the time necessary to change sides.)

The disruption to narrative is inevitable, though, wherever the break is placed. It can be *ignored*, but it cannot be *overcome*. The jolt created by the side breaks becomes an integral part of the text. Moreover, the passive watching of the theatrical experience is replaced by one involving labor, however minimal (getting up and switching sides), encouraging a literal, physical interaction with the medium. (Imagine what it would be like if in the middle of every theatrical viewing you had to wait a few seconds before the film continued; imagine further what it would be like if *you* were responsible for continuing the experience.) This physical interaction involves the *proletarianization* of the video viewer by forcing him/her to become, in effect, a projectionist. And any suppression of the knowledge of technology thus requires a conscious activity: we cannot pretend that the discourse will proceed without us, because it won't until we get off the couch and flip sides.

This fragmentation of the viewing experience gets reinforced by the chapter encoding (although most discs are still produced without chapters). By their very name, chapters call attention to the hybrid nature of the medium. The obvious comparison is with a book. But book chapters are chosen by their authors; however much they segment the narrative, that choice arises at the moment of composition. As such, they are an integral part of the book's form.

Videodisc chapters are not cinematic composition, they are videodisc imposition. They aren't chosen at the point of film production, but after the fact, a voice from outside the text.[8] While common sense might lead one to expect chapters to be equivalent to the cinematic "sequence," in fact they often do not conform to any breakdown of the cinematic action, and there is no single pattern or rationale for their placement. They do, however, encourage the user to think of the text as something other than an unrolling, uninterruptible narrative. (For this reason, at least one well-known producer/director refuses to allow chapter encoding on disc releases of his films.)

Furthermore, while the chapter metaphor evokes books, their function is more similar to the track or cut of an LP or CD. The visual appearance of the videodisc, obviously intended to evoke the LP,[9] reinforces this hybrid association. Scenes or segments of the film end up getting treated like individual pop songs on a record or CD: no longer related to their immediate surroundings, they become isolated as discreet units. Chapter stops run like a mine field under the linear development of classical narrative. Fans of a film no longer have to sit through the parts they don't like; they can jump to their favorite scenes, in whatever order they choose. Imagine how different an experience it would be to enter a movie theater and be able to skip the tedious parts or scramble the order of the reels. "I came for the waters . . ." zip "We'll always have Paris." And I suspect even the viewer

interested only in watching the movie will use the chapter encoding for quicker access. Isn't one of the consequences of the repeated viewings encouraged by home video *boredom*? The significance of chapters is that viewers are beginning to think in these terms, to feel *in control* of a film's tedium.

If chapters evoke books and records, freeze frames turn a film into a sequence of stills or paintings. In so doing, they further destroy linear development. A single CAV side contains 54,000 frames. That's 54,000 possible points of fixation, alternative entries into an imagistic imaginary. The film's characters and story can be discarded in favor of new narratives inspired by the images. Just as photographs and paintings arrest our gaze and inspire us to invent, so too the frozen film image, isolated in time, loses its context and creates a new one.

With motion removed, the film image becomes subject to a different critical discourse. No longer is it enough to talk about an image getting us from point A to B (the narrative prejudice). Criticism of the image's frozen form, composition, lighting, color are invited. Individual images can be subjected to the standards of photography and painting. Of course, few film images can withstand such scrutiny, since most are *composed* in movement.

> Of cource cinema cannot be reduced to its still frames and the semiotic system of cinema cannot be reduced to the systems of painting or of photography. Indeed, the cinematic succession of images threatens to interrupt or even to expose and to deconstruct the representation system which commands static paintings or photos. For its succession of shots is, by that very system, a succession of views.[10]

To the extent that they encourage a criticism based on alternative codes, freeze frames threaten the very basis of classical narrative, in effect reversing the semiotic power relationship noted by Dayan.

"You Have to See It in a Theater"

An undergraduate film-appreciation class at the University of Southern California is taught on the basis that films, in order to be understood fully, must be seen under theatrical conditions. Great expense is taken to obtain good prints; screenings occur in a large facility analogous to first-run theaters in the Los Angeles area. Stress is placed on the larger-than-life aspect of filmgoing. And yet, when a scheduled film is unavailable in 35mm, dirty, murky, 16mm prints are used. Is this part of the theatrical experience?

Yes, although in ways not likely to be on the minds of anyone prejudiced toward theatrical exhibition. This attitude implies that theatrical viewing conditions, even at their worst, are preferable to viewing a decent video version at home. But film exhibition is subject to a range of factors—print quality, film gauge, optical vs. magnetic sound, stereo vs. mono, screen size, aspect ratio, the quality of the reproductive machinery—beyond the control of the consumer. So—which violates the film more, a good video or a bad print?

Most video transfers are made from technically superior film sources. At their best, the resulting tapes or discs have a uniform gloss that is generally not true of theatrical prints outside of initial runs. The benefit of this uniformity is a standardization of presentation, dependent only on the hardware used for reproduction. Of course, all forms of standardization involve loss as well as gain. The variability of theatrical projection can have unintended benefits, when elements not noticed in one circumstance show up under others. But it seems unlikely that anyone would *prefer* a scratchy, inaudible reduction print made from a third generation negative to a video copy made carefully from an early generation source.

Earlier, I introduced the concept of videobility to describe the ease of translating a film into video. But videobility involves more than just questions of whether or not a decent video image can be produced. Some films have high videobility (*The Wizard of Oz* probably seems *more* familiar on video than in a theatrical screening, since most of us know the film through television broadcast). Others strike us as impossible to imagine on video without significant loss (Bondarchuk's *War and Peace*, for example). Is there, then, something in the viewing experience that *depends* on theatrical conditions for full effect of a given film? Or, more properly, what does video lack that film possesses that makes the theatrical experience "essential"?

In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin wrote that

High "videobility": *The Wizard of Oz*

> The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the "spell of the personality," the phony spell of a commodity.[11]

Is the quasi-religious aspect of film viewing, induced by capital or not, "phony"? If a film succeeds in moving us to ecstasy, does it matter in *experiential* terms whether or not it is a "true" sensation? The ecstatic component of (some) filmgoing cannot be dismissed, particularly when discussing it in relationship to home video. For this religious aspect of filmgoing is clearly lacking in home video viewing.

One obvious reason for this lack is the difference in scale. As the cliché has it, film is larger than life, television smaller. And yet the difference between video and film experiences is not scale *as such*, but the depth that greater size gives to film's sensory extravagance. It is that richness, sensual saturation, and euphoria that video cannot duplicate. But if video is excluded from the Dionysian, it gives access to the excess that *creates* ecstasy through the capacity to repeat, slow, freeze, and contemplate. Savoring replaces rapture.

Letterboxing, Mon Amour

The problem of scale has, from the first, been linked to the related issue of aspect ratio. Cinemascope and other wide-screen processes were developed (along with high-fidelity stereo sound) with the purpose of overwhelming viewers with an experience not available on their televisions at home. On the other hand, sale of broadcast and video rights of theatrical features represents a lucrative source of revenue, necessitating a means of squeezing wide-screen images into the TV frame. But you cannot fill the TV frame without either cutting off edges of the film picture, or through anamorphic compression, turning the films into animated El Grecos.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in maintaining the theatrical aspect ratio for video viewing. Unfortunately, this interest has bred the fallacious notion that there is a single "correct" aspect ratio. In fact, it is the *rule*, not the exception, that there is no single "correct" aspect ratio for any wide-screen film. For example, during photography, it is common for directors and cinematographers to "hard matte" some, but not all, of their shots if they expect to exhibit in 1.85 or 1.66. If you examine the negative, some shots would be matted for 1.66, say, and others at full frame 1.33. Which is "correct"?

Frequently too, the ratio of photography will be altered when a film changes gauges. A film might be shot in nonanamorphic 70mm at 2:1, reduced to anamorphic 35mm at 2.35:1, then reduced to 16mm at 1.85:1. (The *Lawrence of Arabia* disc, for example, was produced from a 35mm source, meaning a slight loss of vertical information.) Then there are those processes, like VistaVision, that were *designed* to be shown at different ratios. As if that weren't complex enough, most projectionists show *everything* at 2:1. Is "correct" based on intention, gauge, exhibition, breadth of distribution, amount of visual information, . . . ?

While it might be more prudent to think of an "optimal" aspect ratio, rather than a "correct" one, who should choose the optimum? Asking the director or cinematographer perpetuates the auteurist mystique while assuming that the filmmaker knows best how a film at home should be watched. This approach further assumes that these people are best equipped to translate film images into video images. To privilege film technicians, then, subordinates video to film.

Prior to the involvement of the film's technicians, optimality was visually determined by concentrating on significant dramatic action and sacrificing composition and background detail (by

cropping the edges of the frame). When composition made such reframing impossible (when, for example, two conversing characters occupied opposite edges of the frame), then a "pan-and-scan" optical movement was made; or the frame was edited optically into two shots.

Pan-and-scan transfers are performed largely to preserve narrative and to approximate the theatrical experience by keeping the entire television frame filled. There is an implicit assumption that the *vertical* dimensions of the film frame must be maintained. Letterboxing maintains the full *horizontal* dimension of the wide-screen image. In effect, pan-and-scan transfers privilege the television (thus subordinating film to video). It is more important to fill the TV frame than it is to maintain cinematic composition. Letterboxing reverses that priority by preserving the cinematic framing.

But a transformation occurs in maintaining composition. (If it didn't, letterboxing wouldn't be controversial.) In his essay "CinemaScope: Before and After," Charles Barr writes:

> But it is not only the horizontal line which is emphasized in CinemaScope. . . . The more open the frame, the greater the impression of depth: the image is more vivid, and involves us more directly.[12]

If Barr is correct, letterboxing, by merely maintaining the horizontal measurement of the 'Scope frame, cannot duplicate the wide-screen experience. Letterboxing equates the *shape* of the CinemaScope screen with its *effect*.

In fact, while letterboxing subordinates the TV screen to cinematic composition, it simultaneously *reverses* that hierarchy. If film is usually considered larger and grander than TV, wide-screen film letterboxed in a 1.33 TV frame subjects film to television aesthetics by forcing the film image to become *smaller* than the TV image. Thus, in the act of privileging film over video, video ends up dominant. (The movement from 70mm theatrical exhibition to 19-inch home viewing is one long diminuendo of cinematic effect.)

Moreover, letterboxing is an ambiguous process, with all the resistance ambiguity encounters. A letterboxed image is neither film nor TV. Its diminished size makes it an impossible replacement for the theatrical experience; at the same time, the portentous black bands at the top and bottom of the screen remind the video viewer not only of the "inferiority" of the video image to the film original (it can only accommodate the latter by shrinking it) but also of a lack. What is behind those black bars? Edward Branigan makes the point that the frame is "the boundary which actualizes what is framed" and that "representation is premised upon, and is condemned to struggle against, a fundamental absence."[13]

The absent in film is everything outside the visual field. In a letterboxed transfer of 'Scope films, the matte hides the bottoms and tops of the outgoing and incoming frames. Viewing the film without the matte would make it impossible for us not to be aware of the "cinematicness" of the image, since we would be viewing frame lines in addition to the picture. The mattes for "flat" wide-screen films (1.85:1 and 1.66:1) frequently blot out production equipment such as microphones, camera tracks, and so on, that the director or cinematographer assumed would be matted out in projection.

Both frame lines and extraneous equipment are part of the repressed production process. To see them ruptures the classical diegesis. And the fact that such a violence to our normal cinematic experience is necessary in video would call attention once again to the differences between the media. A double exposure of ideology would occur: of the repressed aspects of cinematic projection (frame lines, equipment)[14] and of the presumed neutrality of the transfer procedure.

Yet there is no useful alternative to letterboxing.[15] Form and composition *are* important; useful analysis of films on video cannot be performed when 43 percent of the image has been cropped, and certainly no one can claim to have seen(!) the film on video under such circumstances. If maintaining the horizontal length of the image creates the fiction that the cinematic experience has been approximated, it is nonetheless a fiction worthy of support. Besides, letterboxing introduces aesthetic effects of its own.

The frame created by the matte contributes one more effect toward treating the cinematic image as an object of analysis. Just as the frame of a painting directs our gaze toward the painting enclosed, so too the letterbox calls attention to the aesthetic qualities of the image framed. But that may be the problem; if people object to letterboxing, it's because it turns their classical narratives into formalist galleries. (Consider how the ponderously

Above: Full reproduction of *Lawrence* frame, without matte

Right: "Full frame" TV image with pan-and-scan

Below: "Full frame" TV image with letterboxed full film frame

pseudo-epic qualities of *Lawrence of Arabia* get lost in a background blur on video, refocusing attention on the flatness of the image and compositional precision.) In fact, letterboxing does precisely the *opposite* of what Barr likes about wide-screen:[16] it ends up *accentuating* composition, rather than effacing it.

"I'll Wait for It on Video"

Who, after becoming used to the flexibility of home video, has not wanted to fast-forward past bits of a boring or offensive theatrical film? Doesn't this desire suggest a transformation of the cinematic experience by home video? What we once might have endured, we now resent. Hollywood continues to offer plodding, linear narratives wilted with halfhearted humanism as the staple of its production. But doesn't our itchy, reflexive reaching for the remote control suggest a complete *saturation* by classical narrative?

Whether we like it or not, home video turns us all into critics. Instead of being engulfed by an overwhelming image that moves without our par-

ticipation, we're able to subject film texts to our whims. And by allowing the viewer greater insight into an object of cultural production, home video starts to break the hold of individual texts and, possibly, of cinema in general. This conscious participation in film viewing can only be helped by the widespread dissemination of film texts, even in hybrid form.

We're back to Benjamin again. Having a good reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* does not substitute for the actual painting but it "enables the original to meet the beholder halfway," and in so doing, the copy "reactivates the object reproduced."[17] Well-produced home video performs the same function for film texts, which, the "phoniness" of the theatrical experience notwithstanding, *are* invested with an aura by classical practices of obfuscation, suppression, and capitalist investment in the commodity of the image. As home video allows us to meet the film text halfway, it does to film what film-makers have done to the world for years: turns it into an object for control.

At the same time, a conscious video consumer must confront the reality that home video is a luxury, that the possession of the equipment results from a position of privilege, thus perpetuating the very economic relations the active viewership (might) help undermine. Does this reality turn any video viewing into a guilty pleasure? One answer to this dilemma may reside in the writings of Epicurus, whose philosophy of pleasure derived from moral calculation may be the best guide for the aware consumer:

> The flesh perceives the limits of pleasure as unlimited and unlimited time is required to supply it. But the mind, having attained a reasoned understanding of the ultimate good of the flesh and its limits . . . supplies us with the complete life, and we have no further need of infinite time: but neither does the mind shun pleasure.[18]

Videodiscs make us into proletarians and encourage criticism through physical interaction and segmentation. But, produced with care to maintain some aspect of the scopic pleasure of the cinematic image, they make possible a connoisseurship of form that theatrical viewing discourages. Videodisc viewing sits at an awkward juncture between criticism and experience, analysis and ecstasy, progress and privilege. As we participate in this ambiguous vacillation between oppositions, we become a postmodern contradiction: the Proletarian Epicure.

Moreover, home video gives us a means of almost literally "deconstructing" films, helping us remake them to our own ends. Even those who deny their proletarian position by viewing these film/videos in a linear fashion end up, as they change sides or put the VCR in pause, participating in the creation of an alternative text. Videodiscs, as a hybrid medium dedicated to reproducing an experience alien to it, standardizes, fragments, commodifies, objectifies, and segments that experience. You can "wait for it on video," but "it," like Godot, will never arrive, because the discs' high-tech insouciance offers, despite their truckling to the capitalist realities, a revolutionary hope: the destruction of classical cinema.

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1. Consider this note on the back of 20th Century-Fox videodisc packages: "Special Wide Screen Edition. The film contained on this laserdisc is being presented for your enjoyment in the wide screen format, or 'letterbox,' allowing you to experience the film at home as closely to the original version as possible." All the major video publishers have some variation on this note, stressing the disc's fidelity to the theatrical original and the normality of the shape of the letterboxed image.
2. Though still far fewer than are available on tape. Neither medium has really made a dent in the library of available film titles. Who, what, and why decides which titles are available on video is a subject unto itself.
3. Super VHS, Hi-Band Video 8, and ED-Beta offer the same number of lines of horizontal resolution as videodiscs. However, all of these magnetic media suffer from an immediate wear and tear not true of discs.
4. This particular limitation is not only frustrating for anyone interested in sound/image relationships, it's downright odd. CD players, which are designed for audio *only*, allow us to hear samples of the music as we scan. Why is there no equivalent for film listening?
5. Brightness range is the difference between the brightest and darkest parts of the shot. Contrast is the brightness range between any two given spots in the shot. For a concise description of the technical inequities of the two me-

dia, see Dominic J. Case, "Telecine-Compatible Prints," *SMPTE Journal*, June 1989, pp. 415-54. For a discussion of color sensitometry, see H.J. Bello, "An Introduction to the Technology of Color Films (Film Colorimetry)—A Tutorial Paper," *SMPTE Journal*, November 1979.

6. See Graham Carter, "Mastering of Dolby Stereo Film Material for Videocassette Release," *Audio Plus*, March 1991.
7. Some videodisc players are capable of playing two sides, but the disruption remains since the viewer has to wait as the laser repositions at the beginning of the second side.
8. The Criterion Collection frequently provides literal "voices from outside the text" by recording audio commentary running with the film. Obviously, these commentaries encourage an alternative perception as well.
9. For a short discussion of the early reaction to videodiscs, see Barry Fox, "Video discs—too late for the gravy train?" *New Scientist*, vol. 91, no. 1260, pp. 277-80. Videodiscs, in fact, were the parent technology of CDs; the latter's success has given videodiscs their second market life.
10. Daniel Dayan, "The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema," *Film Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 1, p. 28.
11. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 686.
12. Charles Barr, "CinemaScope: Before and After," *Film Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 4, p. 9.
13. Edward Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema: A Theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film* (Berlin and New York: Mouton Publishers, 1984), p. 65.
14. Consider the following comment: "Note that in 1971 an ANSI specification was published to limit the projector aperture to a height of 0.700″ (instead of the 0.715″ previously specified) to limit the screen appearance of splices." Fred H. Detmers, "Photograph Systems," *American Cinematographer Manual*, ed. and comp. Charles G. Clarke, 5th ed. (Hollywood: American Society of Cinematographers, 1980), p. 44.
15. Even if an HDTV standard is introduced that produces a ratio wide enough to accommodate Panavision and Cinemascope, there will still be a need for *vertical* masking of films (and videos?) shot in the 1.33 ratio. May I propose we call this vertical matting "keyholing"?
16. Barr, op. cit.
17. Benjamin, op. cit., p. 678.
18. *Epicurus: the Extant Remains*, trans. Cyril Bailey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), p. 99.

[Other sources used for this piece were David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); and Matt McGillicuddy, *Color Television Fundamentals, NTSC, PAL and SECAM*, s.l., Ampex Corporation, s.d.]

A New Beginning

A TEXTUAL FRAME ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN FILM

Joanne Morreale

This book is a postmodern analysis of Ronald Reagan's 1984 film, *A New Beginning*, which marked the coming-of-age of the televisual political campaign film. The film was a landmark in the art of political filmmaking. Its thesis proclaimed a resurgence of American pride, patriotism, and prosperity under the leadership of Ronald Reagan. *A New Beginning* was unprecedented for a number of reasons: it replaced the traditional nominating speech for the candidate at the Republican National Convention; its form was a hybrid documentary and advertisement; it illustrated the use of televisual rebirth rhetoric to gain public support for a political ideology; and, most importantly, the masterful project documented a shift from verbal to visual rhetoric in American presidential campaigning.

The author examines the film as a cultural text and as an effective political tool. Framing, ideology, myth, and visual cliché are analytic tools used to deconstruct the film; the method combines rhetorical theory with communication theory and semiotically-based theories of film and television. Morreale gives insight into the increasingly prevalent use of television to create a political reality.

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Scott MacDonald

Demystifying the Female Body

Anne Severson—*Near the Big Chakra*
Yvonne Rainer—*Privilege*

During the past thirty years, women (and men) film-makers have devised a variety of tactics for confronting sexist dimensions of the commercial cinema, especially its depiction of the female body. The two films—*Near the Big Chakra* (1972) and *Privilege* (1990)—discussed in the following interviews with Anne Severson (now Alice Anne Parker) and Yvonne Rainer reveal tactics characteristic of two different eras. As different as the films are, however, both reflect the determination of many independent film-makers to work for healthier cinematic representations and responses to the female body and, more specifically, for an understanding and a relation to the body as an organism, an evolving process, rather than as a conventionally erotic, static icon.

As a film-maker, Anne Severson was (she has not made films since 1974) a product of the sixties, especially the sixties' reaction to an earlier puritanism about the human body. For many film-makers, the body was a territory in need of liberation from both the residue of Hays Office demands that it be hidden in film and the more general cultural assumption that sexuality was a moral issue rather than a natural process—an assumption that had been evident during much of conventional film history and that was equally evident in the early seventies' pornographic inversion of puritanism. Severson's earliest films confront these issues in several ways. In *I Change I Am the Same* (1969), a man and a woman stand before the camera in brief alternating shots (the entire film is 40 seconds long), dressed or partially dressed in each other's clothes. During the seven minutes of *Riverbody* (1970), 87 nude males and females are seen one by one, each dissolving into the next, to the sound of lapping water. The two films implicitly polemicize the naturalness of the body and satirize the social control of the body by means of the gender (and other) roles encoded in dress.

By the time she made *Near the Big Chakra*, Severson had come to realize that the politics of the body as image were different for the two genders. Of course, film had always marketed young, shapely female bodies, but as the strictures against nudity fell, women found themselves increasingly exposed. And more importantly, all dimensions of the female as organism continued to be routinely suppressed. For Severson, this pattern seemed increasingly problematic, and *Near the Big Chakra* was her response.

The film presents, in extreme close-up, the vulvas of 37 women, ranging in age from three months to 56 years. Each vulva is presented in a single continuous shot, though from time to time Severson adjusts the zoom lens; the shots are of varying lengths. *Near the Big Chakra* lasts 17 minutes and seems to most viewers substantially longer, especially since it's silent. The tradition of transforming female bodies into lifeless, conventionally "erotic" icons is continually subverted: Tampax strings hang from some vaginas; some of

the women contract muscles; hands reach into the image to reveal the baby's vulva more clearly; and from time to time there's evidence of an infection or of semen.

I've seen few films that demonstrate an audience's investment in the conventional imaging of women more dramatically than *Near the Big Chakra*. Indeed, the film is a way of measuring the degree to which our experiences with conventional film (and with the depiction of women's bodies in other media) have caused us to romanticize women. The extent of a viewer's shock or disgust at the film—and these are the standard reactions, even now—is a gauge of that viewer's investment in women as beautiful (inorganic) object. Of course, one might argue that the enlargement of the vulvas effected by filming and projecting them is the cause of much of this response and that any part of any real body, magnified to this extent, might shock viewers. While this may be true, the romanticized, "perfect" bodies visually polemicized by the Hollywood industry are enlarged as well. Severson's shock tactic is simply a means for producing a more balanced, sensible view of reality unenlarged.

Privilege is Yvonne Rainer's most recent addition to a film-making career of 20 years that has produced six features, a career that was beginning as Severson's was ending (though Rainer's career as director followed an influential career in dance/choreography/performance). From the beginning, Rainer's film-making critiqued the exploitation of the female body that, by the early seventies, had become pervasive not only in the pornography industry but in commercial and avant-garde film-making and in American culture in general. Her *Lives of Performers* (1972), an anti-illusionistic melodrama about dancers preparing a performance, deals with the body in a "nonhierarchical" fashion: that is, Rainer asked cinematographer Babette Mangolte to frame the bodies of the female and male performers so as to demonstrate that all parts of the body were equally important and that no particular body or body part was of interest because of its "innate" eroticism; *these* bodies were bodies-at-work, not spectacles for the conventionally eroticized viewer.

Film About a Woman Who . . . (1974) confronted the issue of the male gaze directly. While the film is about the private lives of a group of men and women, and even their sexual interaction, Rainer developed a wide range of techniques for undercutting the conventional moviegoer's expectations, including frequent interruption of live-action scenes by printed texts and still photographs and an avoidance of traditional means for creating identification between the viewer and a particular character. In one shot where a nude woman *is* seen, Rainer presents her in a most unusual way: as the camera tracks toward the woman, a man—his eyes fixed on the camera/viewer, rather than on the woman—pulls up her bloomers, covering her as we approach. The camera finally veers to the left and closes in on Rainer's face, to which are affixed newspaper clippings relating to the love affair of Angela Davis and George Jackson. The issue of the voyeuristic spectator is confronted in two different ways: the shot deals with voyeurism as it functions during our "private" experiences as film viewers, then reminds us of one of many instances where the media has deflected attention from race and class onto conventional eroticism.

In the films that followed *Film About a Woman Who . . .*, Rainer increasingly dispensed with the sensual dimensions of film content and style, relying more and more on a weave of self-reflexive narrative actions she invented and/or appropriated from texts written by others. Indeed, by the time of *Journeys from Berlin/1971* (1980), Rainer was making films that refused viewers nearly all forms of conventional cinematic sensuality. And then, Rainer found a topic—menopause—so far beyond the pale of conventional movies that her decision to reembrace pleasure became as defiant of convention as her previous rejection of pleasure had been. As Rainer makes clear, menopause has been culturally defined as a process that destroys a woman's desire and desirability—it is the tail end of youth and eroticism, the epitome of the uncinematic. *Privilege* is an explicit critique of the conventional view of women that has made menopause cinematically taboo. The fact that *Privilege* engages and fascinates even rather conventional audiences (at least in my experience as exhibitor) makes it a breakthrough and a potential catalyst for the liberation of women and men from cinematic assumptions about the body that have constricted our lives in the most obvious ways.

The central narrative thread of *Privilege* is the reminiscences of Jenny, a middle-aged, white,

bourgeois woman, thinking about a particular, troubling moment early in her career as a dancer. In her "hot flashback," Jenny recalls moving into an apartment in a comparatively high-rent building next door to less affluent Puerto Rican and African-American neighbors, Carlos, Digna, and Stew, and becoming friends with Brenda, a lesbian living in her building. Like other neighborhood residents, Jenny becomes accustomed to the fights between Carlos and Digna. Soon after Digna is arrested and taken to Bellevue after a particularly violent fight, Carlos enters Brenda's apartment late at night, naked, and when Brenda screams Jenny comes to her rescue. Ultimately, Brenda presses charges and Jenny, annoyed at the defense attorney's attempts to categorize her as a loose woman, perjures herself, saying she actually saw Carlos in Brenda's apartment. Later, she becomes lovers with the assistant district attorney. This central episode is elaborated by Rainer in characteristically anti-illusionist fashion: throughout her flashback, Jenny remains her current, menopausal age; Digna becomes an invisible (to the other characters) commentator, particularly about Jenny's love affair with the wealthy assistant district attorney; and the narrative is regularly interrupted by other kinds of information, including dramatizations of dreams.

Interwoven with the basic melodramatic situation are numerous interviews about menopause with Jenny and with many women who are clearly not characters in the film's central fiction. The interviews are conducted by Rainer herself, with the exception of the interview with Jenny, which is conducted by Yvonne Washington, Rainer's African-American alter ego. Essentially, the use of this alter ego allows Rainer to develop two levels of inquiry in the film. The first involves menopause as it affects women of various economic and ethnic backgrounds, physically and psychologically, positively and/or negatively. The second involves race: Yvonne Washington is able to explore and critique Jenny's attitudes and the degree to which the shape of her thinking is determined not simply by her maturation as a woman but by her privileged social status as a white woman with financial resources. Or, to put this another way: since Jenny's flashback is based on Rainer's experiences after first moving to New York City, the Yvonne Washington alter ego allows Rainer to interrogate herself as she questions other women.

Both *Near the Big Chakra* and *Privilege* challenge convention in their choice of content—their focus on the female body as evolving organism—and at the level of production. As Severson makes clear in the conversation that follows, and as is implicit in the film, *Near the Big Chakra* was the result of a collaborative feminist process. Rainer honors the collaborative dimensions in *Privilege* not only in her characteristic revelation of the process of filming the story as it is related but in *Privilege*'s unusual credit sequence: textual credits are interspersed with further interviews, comments by Yvonne Washington, *and* with shots of the party that followed the filming—we get a sense of the private world or at least the social milieu out of which the public event of the film has developed. In both films, women reveal themselves to each other as a way of cinematically reappropriating the nature and experience of their bodies from a conventional cinema that has often drained the life out of them. To some sensibilities, *Near the Big Chakra* might seem poles apart from *Privilege*—one relentlessly exposes women's bodies, the other presents women's thoughts about a physical process—but they are, equally, evidence of the persistence of some women film-makers in trying to expand the spaces and times with which women can discover their commonalities, their distinctions, and their capabilities.

My discussion with Severson was conducted through an exchange of voice tapes during the summer of 1990, followed by an exchange of edited drafts of the transcribed interview. I talked with Rainer in person in January, 1991, and subsequently by phone. When the two interviews were conducted, I had no plans to link them together. But historically and conceptually the films reveal each other, and together they expose the conventional cinema.

Interviews

MacDonald: *How did you originally conceive* Near the Big Chakra*?*

Severson: I've been thinking about that movie a lot as I've worked on my new book.[1] I knew when I made that film that I was taking a big chance, that it might scandalize and disturb peo-

ple. *Near the Big Chakra* was made in 1971, at the end of that first great wave of feminism, which certainly opened the door to a lot of forbidden thoughts and issues. I think as a film it created a certain space.

Janis Joplin was a neighbor of mine. She used to sing with Big Brother and the Holding Company at a ratty little bar in Berkeley called the Blind Lemon. I was living with a man from Texas at the time; he had been a student at the University of Texas when Janis was there. She had been much maligned because she violated a lot of ideas about how women were supposed to behave. They weren't supposed to be sloppy, loud, drunk; they were supposed to comb their hair, shave under their arms.... Looking back now, it doesn't seem so radical or unconventional. But when she was first performing, she was on the edge, and I really appreciated that. By taking such an extreme position, she made all the space in between available.

Eldridge Cleaver and the Black Panthers did a similar thing when they first started expressing that macho, potentially violent image of black men, holding big guns and wearing black leather. They created a much larger space for all black men, by taking an extreme position.

The film certainly makes sense in that context, but how did you come to the idea of filming vulvas in extreme close-up?

I told that story in the *Spare Rib* article.[2] I got the idea to make the movie one day in California when my teenage daughter was lounging nude in the sun after a bath, casually exposing herself. I found myself staring at her vagina. When she noticed me, she said, "Mother, for heaven's sakes!" We both felt a little embarrassed.

Later it seemed odd to me that, first, I had not looked at that part of her body since she was very small, and second, that my curiosity had made me uncomfortable, as though there was something wrong with my interest. I realized that I had never seen any woman's vagina except in crotch shots in pornographic films and magazines or close-ups in birth films. I asked my women friends if they had ever looked at other women's vaginas. One or two, with bisexual experience, assured me they had; most hadn't. Few wanted to pursue the matter.

I started talking about making a film about vaginas. Men film-maker friends listened to me with distaste. Bob Nelson was the first to support me. He became interested and, in a burst of enthusiasm, produced the title.

His wife Diane and I were taking a yoga class together and I was intrigued that the first chakra one gains control of, or "awakens," in yogic terms, was located between the genitals and the anus. "Chakra" is Sanskrit for wheels or centers of radiating life force. Joseph Campbell calls them "centers of consciousness." There are seven or eight, depending upon the system you follow. The first is located at the base of the spine. It's the chakra of pure physical being, survival—the place where you just hang on.

The second is where all psychological energy is erotic or creative. I was jokingly calling it the "big chakra" because in the early seventies we all seemed to be stuck at this level of development. It also seemed to me that the way out of this morass was to transform some of this energy into art. In the proposed film I wanted to focus on the same area that our energy was flowing from in the beginning yoga class. I also hoped to creatively release some of this energy for myself and other women in order to move on up the cerebrospinal ladder.

Anyway, enough people told me it was a terrible idea which I should not pursue under any circumstances that I definitely decided to do it. *Near the Big Chakra* assumes that it's a good idea to take a look at things, even if they're forbidden or taboo, or frightening, or exciting, or mysterious, or dangerous. I guess that's one of my basic assumptions about what's interesting to do in the world and also what's interesting to do in art.

How did you find participants?

I went to Glide Methodist Church in San Francisco. At that time the church was very active in the area of human sexuality. Later, the group at Glide evolved into Multimedia Film Distribution Center. They presented all kinds of sexuality seminars and classes.

I approached them and asked if they'd produce the film and, in fact, they did. They paid for it and sent people from their courses to be in it. Then I did a flyer with a red rose—a good symbol for the vagina: spiritual unfolding, femininity, fecundity —coyly inviting women to be in a film about "women's parts."

I shot it at the San Francisco Art Institute,

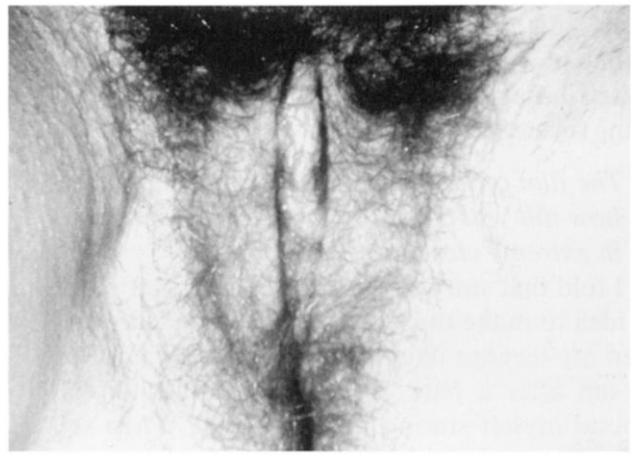
where I was teaching. A student of mine—a very maternal, comfortable, candid woman, met people in an anteroom near the room where I was filming. She described what I was doing and talked about the film. Also, there were women in the anteroom who had already been photographed. They would hang around and talk to other women who had come in to find out what was going on before they decided whether to be in the film or not. It was very relaxed, and I think almost everybody who came by that day was in the film. It turned out to be easy, although I had been a little nervous about it—fearing that not enough people would show up. Altogether, 38 women appeared in the film. The age range was from three months to 63 years. There were two black women, one half-oriental girl, two lesbians, one prostitute, two virgins (I think), a lot of mothers, three mothers-to-be, three grandmothers, four women menstruating, one girl who discovered a week later she had gonorrhea, and one woman who learned a month later that she had uterine cancer. None of these characteristics is evident in the film—except the women who are menstruating: you can see their Tampax strings.

At that time in the Bay Area there was a certain willingness to experiment on every front, and I think most of the people in the film are people who were already known to me or who already knew my work. They had been my students at the Art Institute, or they were friends, or mothers of friends, or children of friends, or other artists. There was a certain level of trust. My films had been shown around town a lot, and at that point independent film-making was an acknowledged art form in the Bay Area and received a lot of attention from the press. It was like going to a be-in.

In general, that was a time of casual nudity. There were often parties at the Art Institute where almost everybody was nude. Adam Bartlett was visiting us here in Hawaii last summer. He's the son of Scott Bartlett, who was one of the most successful film-makers in the Bay Area in the sixties and seventies. Adam's 20 now, a student at Santa Cruz. I had taken him to a party given by some friends here, who recognized his name and were curious about what it was like to grow up in that milieu. He said, "My folks would get together with their friends and everybody would take off their clothes and they'd make a movie." He was right. Part of the process of social interaction at that point in history seemed to be casual nudity. Actually, at one point I had planned to make a film called *Casual Nudity*, because that phenomenon was so widespread. *Chakra* is also part of that phenomenon.

In your Spare Rib *article, you often use "cunt." Was the word more acceptable in that milieu than it is now?*

Women *were* disturbed by my using "cunt." I was often questioned by feminists when I showed the film. My position at the time was that if a word was loaded for you, the best way to demystify it and disarm it was to make it your word and use it. So during that period I always referred to vaginas as "cunts," particularly when I was showing *Chakra* and talking about it. Then at some point I stopped doing it. It's not a word I use very often now.



My current students find Chakra *the most shocking film I show them. I'm sure it shocks* them *more than it did the original audiences. But I'd be very interested to know what kinds of experiences you've had with the film.*

There are a *lot* of stories.

I had been invited to show the film in London at a College of Engineers. Now usually I showed at film societies, women's groups, or art schools, but for some reason I was invited to a College of Engineers! It turned out that people there were relatively comfortable and interested in the movie. By this time, my daughter was 15 or 16

years old and in a love relationship with a delightful man, a good friend, Barney Boatman, who had grown up in a radical political household in London and was very smart, very articulate, very well-read. He had come to the film showing, never having seen my films. At the end of the screening, when I asked people for their responses, he said that he had found it very disturbing. I asked, "What was disturbing about it for you?" And he said, "Well, I found myself unconsciously thinking that this wasn't feminine. And *then* I thought, well, how can this *not* be feminine. I mean this is the female part of females! So I looked at my attitudes and realized that, without really knowing it, I had developed certain assumptions about femininity—that feminine means symmetrical and pink and pretty and delicate. I realized that even though I thought I was conscious, I still held unconscious attitudes about femininity." I really appreciated his comment and his willingness to share it publicly.

I had other, very different responses. At one point, I was invited to the University of Wales in Aberystwyth, which was presenting a fine-arts festival. I couldn't resist the idea of a fine-arts festival in Aberystwyth. I had also been invited to Cannes to show *I Change, I Am the Same*, a stunning little 45-second movie that's still out there making money for me, which is really satisfying. Both invitations were for the same dates. Being invited to Cannes was quite a *coup* for an independent film-maker, but I decided to go to Wales instead. I discovered that the University of Wales in Aberystwyth was a hotbed of Charles Olson studies. I'm sure you know the American poet, Charles Olson, whom I had met a couple of times and really admired and loved. My boyfriend, D.V. John Dubberstein, and I were staying with a lecturer in the English department who was much more interested in my anecdotal memories of Charles Olson than in my films.

Anyway, the first night of that festival was devoted to a showing of films by Stan Brakhage, also a friend of mine from California, and John's cousin. I think John actually owned some of Brakhage's films because we had a copy of *The Art of Seeing*. I was very familiar with Brakhage's work, so I took it upon myself to represent him at the screenings and answer some of the questions from the audience. *Window Water Baby Moving* was shown and a few other things, and there was general outcry and outrage—at *Window Water Baby Moving*! I remember one person in particular, an English professor, who objected *violently* to that movie, and said, among other very hostile things, "Would you film someone making toilet?" I remember thinking, "Does he mean putting on makeup? Is that some kind of eighteenth-century phrase he's using, or is he talking about someone going to the bathroom?" So, when I stood up, I said, "I found your comment very interesting although I wasn't sure if you were talking about someone putting on makeup or someone peeing or shitting." Of course, that created even more uproar, as I, I'm ashamed to say, intended it to. Later, I said in a very direct way that I was showing my films the next evening and that if anyone had been offended by Brakhage's *Window Water Baby Moving* I would strongly recommend that they not come to my show, or at least that they wait until the second half hour.

The next day, as I was walking through one of the university buildings in the early afternoon on my way to a panel discussion, I passed a room with a door ajar, through which I heard the sound track from *Riverbody*. I pushed the door open and there was a little screen and a group of men watching my films by themselves, like at a private smoker. I stayed in the back. The next film on the reel was *Chakra*, and the group watched what I then called the "Cunt Movie," yakking and making jokes: "What did you have for breakfast? That's your mother"—that sort of thing. I waited until the program was over. Then I turned on the light, and looked very carefully to see who was there. Of course, the professor who had made the comment the day before was there. I looked at them and laughed and said, "Well, I'm certainly glad that you got to see this privately, because I know how difficult it would be for you to watch it in public!" And I quoted some of their remarks. It was wonderful. Of course, that evening I told the story to the entire community. I was also very pleased when a graduate student who had been with the all-male party that afternoon got up and talked about the difference between seeing the film in a mixed audience and as part of an all-male smoker.

I showed the film as part of a program of my own films and films by others that David Boatwright and I took all over Europe for a year. If

you were a recognized film-maker, you could easily schedule a European tour and show your films all over. You didn't make much money, enough to live on while you were traveling around with the films. And there were very interested, communicative, sophisticated people in Belgium, France, particularly in Holland, Scandinavia, and Germany. Hundreds of people would show up to see and discuss the films.

The film community in Holland at that time was very active, and I think the museum there had scheduled 18 film showings for us in about three weeks. We would get on a train, travel to a new city, be met by people and taken out to dinner, do a film showing that night. Sometimes we'd have a day in between, but usually the next morning we'd go someplace else. Sometimes there were small groups in basements with a little projector and screen, but often there were big auditoriums. David was in England when I went to The Hague for a show. I was met at the train station by three middle-aged businessmen, very serious—art collectors, very interested in independent film. We had a wonderful dinner together. Driving to the screening, we passed a cinema and there was a long line of people waiting out front and a big marquee. I casually asked what the performance was that night. They said, "That's where *your* films are being shown." At the beginning of the show, I got up and did an introduction in English—most Dutch people speak English. As usual, it was a very attentive crowd. I was grateful that I had already been on the road for a while so that my presentation was quite polished. As usual, I said that there was a film about cunts and recommended that people who would be uncomfortable might at that point get up and leave. I also mentioned that it was a silent film, and then I went back and sat down in the middle of the theater with the three businessmen, one of whom was the Minister of Art or the equivalent for the Netherlands. The films came on—*Chakra* was fourth or fifth in the program. There were some wonderful movies in that program: Scott Bartlett's *Stand Up and Be Counted*, Neal White's *Putting the Babies Back Part II*—a collection of great films from Canyon Cinema.

When *Chakra* came on, at first there was a total hush, no coughing, no movement, nothing at all happening. Then I could hear voices making jokes, though, of course, I couldn't understand them because they were in Dutch. Every once in a while you'd hear a deep male voice say something obviously obscene, and a ripple of laughter would move through the crowd. I didn't know where the voices were coming from. It turned out that the professional projectionists weren't used to projecting silent films, and they hadn't realized that when they made loud comments up in the projection booth their comments would trickle down on everybody. I really loved that because the audience could sense the difference between their experience of the film and the experience of these guys up in the projection booth watching it and responding—they thought—privately. I was disappointed when the Minister of Art went up and made them stop.

At the end of that screening, I went up on stage to answer questions, and, of course, a lot of questions were about *Chakra*. When I talked about *Chakra*, as usual, I used the word "cunt." Afterward, the Minister and I were photographed, smiling and shaking hands—the classic newspaper photograph. It appeared in the paper the next day, quoting the Minister as saying, "I, too, am very interested in cunt." [Laughter] I wish I still had that clipping.

How was Chakra *received in this country? Were there memorable screenings?*

Oh yes! After I'd been traveling in Europe for a year, I came back to the States briefly and was invited to be a judge at Ann Arbor, which at that time was *the* big independent film festival. *Riverbody* had won first place there in 1970. In fact, that's when I started taking myself seriously as a film-maker. When I had finished *Chakra*, I sent it to Ann Arbor, and I hadn't heard anything about it. I assumed they didn't like it. The next year when I came to be a judge, I heard incredible stories about *Chakra* being screened there the year before. Apparently I had been invited to be a judge because the board of the festival wanted to see the person who made *that* movie.

I learned that at the previous festival the judges couldn't agree to give *Chakra* a prize, but they had decided to show it in the festival as the last film on the last night—a position traditionally reserved for exciting new movies. Everyone was curious about the fact that the exciting new film being shown last, made by someone who had won first prize before, had not won a prize, and was not included on the Ann Arbor tour. There was a huge crowd. When

the film came on the event turned into a riot. The theater had a projection booth above the audience that you got to by ladder. Someone in the audience was so outraged by the film that he had climbed up and tackled the projectionist, Peter Wilde. They wrestled on the floor, the guy determined to pull the film out of the projector. People were booing and yelling and leaving. A woman stood at the door and, as people tried to walk out, she would swing her long shoulder bag by the handle and hit them over the head. When I met her the next year, she said, "You know, I would kill for that film." I thought, "My God, how could this have created so much furor?" I loved hearing about it, but I'm also glad I missed that screening.

Did you show the film outside the standard avant-garde screening spaces?

Sometimes. One summer I showed *Chakra* in my hometown, Eugene, Oregon. I had wrongly assumed that this would be a straitlaced, middle-class crowd. What I had not anticipated was that Eugene (at that time) was the lesbian separatist capital of the world! I went through an elaborate presentation, trying to make people comfortable, making all the wrong assumptions about whom I was speaking to. After the program, I was answering questions, and someone asked about my intentions and whether I thought the film was erotic. I answered, "To my knowledge, no one has ever gotten a hard-on watching it." A woman in striped overalls stood up and said, "I did!" I loved that—but it was a tough screening; I completely miscalculated my audience.

I was also invited to show *Chakra*, along with my other films, to medical students at the University of Southern California Medical School. I'd had some warning that the young doctors might be abusive, so I went with a friend who had a three-month-old baby, and I insisted on holding the baby all through the screening and during the question-and-answer period after. I recommend that if you expect to find yourself in a similar situation.

Looking back, the only regret I have about *Chakra* is that the titles are so sloppy. I was teaching at the Art Institute when I made most of my movies. It was a macho kind of place. In general, it wasn't considered appropriate to be too concerned about the niceties of your production or your performance. Things being a little rough around the edges was not only acceptable, it was admired. Now I look back at those films and I like the ones where I did a really clean job on the titles. I should redo the titles on *Chakra* and make them clean and very cool, almost clinical.

Have you continued to make films? Nothing is listed in the Canyon Catalogue after 1974.

No. I made one or two more films in England; *Animals Running* and *The Struggle of the Meat* are still distributed. I stayed in England instead of returning to the Art Institute because I was driven (that's definitely the word!) to seek teachers to help me develop some psychic capacities that had been surfacing. It was clear to me that something was happening to me, and I had to find out what to do with it, how to direct it more effectively.

In England I started working on a videotape series on unorthodox healing methods. I believed this would provide me with a kind of cover while I observed different teachers and their work. The third healer I interviewed was Dr. Thomas Maughan, a homeopathic doctor and Chief of the Ancient Order of Druids. He effortlessly lured me into the Order with some very tasty information about dreams and dreamwork.

Now I'm working a lot with dreams again. Personal movies. I have a call-in radio show on dreams in Honolulu, and I write a dream column. I'm still interested in basically the same thing—finding a convenient vehicle that makes it easy and exciting for people to explore and expand their own awareness. I think that's been my own lifetime script. Originally I thought my movies, and particularly *Chakra*, had that value. Now I guess you could say I'm working with other people to improve the scripts of their own inner dreams. You should hear some of the wild and hairy dreams that are called in to the radio show. By comparison, *Chakra* is pretty tame!

MacDONALD: *In recent years every time there's a new Yvonne Rainer film I read someplace "This is new and accessible work from Yvonne Rainer."*

RAINER: They said that about the last one, and I've heard it about *Privilege*.

I didn't find The Man Who Envied Women *more accessible than earlier work—though there*

were elements of it I liked—but I do find Privilege *extremely accessible. I enjoyed it from beginning to end, and when I screened it as part of my film series in Utica I discovered it was accessible to a relatively general audience.*

This is a mainstream-geared audience?

Pretty much. My series has a reputation, so the audience usually expects something unusual, but they're certainly not shy about leaving. At Privilege *I don't believe more than five people left, out of 75 or 80. I've always assumed that your refusal to provide certain kinds of conventional pleasure was a defiance of what the audience has come to expect. But this film includes the audience in a new way.*

In Australia, someone asked me—after screening *Privilege*—"Why are you so committted to depriving the audience of pleasure?"

I was astounded, because I have never thought of myself as depriving anyone of pleasure, unless a shot or a sequence had a specific political agenda, like the tracking shot into the nude in *Film About a Woman Who* . . . . There was a specific mission there. It was an arduous experience for the audience to stay with that shot: *no* one could derive pleasure from *that* image of the woman's body. But in the general course of things, *I* always thought I was introducing *new* pleasures—the pleasure of the text, of reading.

It's true; there are pleasures in many of the stories told in your films but not much visual *pleasure, especially in the films after* Film About a Woman Who . . . *; that film and* Lives of Performers *have an unpretentious elegance and sensuality that's lacking in the later films, especially from* Journeys from Berlin/1971 *and* The Man Who Envied Women. *So when* Privilege *struck me as thoroughly pleasurable, I thought that since, as Jenny says at the beginning of the film, the subject of menopause has come to* mean *unpleasure, you felt free to bring back other obvious kinds of cinematic pleasure as a defiance of the conventional attitude about menopause (and its implications for women), and as a way of modeling a new attitude about menopause (and about film).*

That may be a way of reading the progression of my films, but it was certainly not uppermost in my mind.

What *has* been on my mind is an ongoing relationship to narrative, be it about pleasure or non-pleasure. If narrative is a way of *engaging* the audience, I've gone further and further toward narrative conventions, such as *plot*: this is the first of my films that has a semblance of a plot; it's the first film to use so many professional actors. This is the first film that does not have some overly long passage that people just can't stay with—the theoretical lecture in *The Man Who Envied Women*, or the anecdotal, voice-over material in *Journeys from Berlin*. I have always thought of my films as containing dry moments, but compensating for those with offsetting moments—with animals or stories or irony, humor.

This is also the first film where you use extensive interviewing, isn't it?

Well, there's the housing hearing in *The Man Who Envied Women*, but I didn't interview those people. It's talking heads, people giving testimony.

Women talking about their menopausal experiences is, actually, fascinating. Ironically, since it's been a taboo subject in movies, it's become as interesting as other taboo subjects that have to do with the body. The audience—at least the audience I saw the film with—seemed excited to hear these revelations.

These are all young people?

About half of them were college people; half were older people from the community.

I often get the question from men, "Who's your audience?" At one point I was saying, "It's young women and men, because young women don't *want* to know about menopause, and men have no reason to, have nothing at stake."

Unless the man is deeply involved with someone struggling with menopause. Near the end, the Yvonne Washington character says,

> *I try to monitor when my hot flashes occur. I'm watching a videocassette of* Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song. *"Why does an embodiment of black protest have to be a stud?" flashes through my mind, and along comes a hot flash. I'm on the subway thinking about a friend. "Forget that family crap," I think.* Flash. . . . *Ready to leave, I put on my coat in an overheated room. Instantly I am so hot, I must tear it off. . . . Reading about the Supreme Court's latest setback to civil rights. One of the Justices is quoted as saying; "The*

fact that low-paying, unskilled jobs are overwhelmingly held by blacks is no proof of racism." Flash. . . . *Thinking about what I could have said, should have said:* Flash. . . .

The implication seems to be that you question whether at least some of the symptoms of menopause have anything to do with the physical changes occurring.

That was psychological license; it was a way of bringing together the body and the external, social issues: race, especially.

I ask because during a particularly stressful period of my marriage with Pat, she felt her hot flashes were pretty closely related to the psychic stress caused by outside circumstances.

I've heard of only one corroboration of this. It certainly isn't my experience, but it sounds plausible. In *Privilege*, it was a way of bringing together everything in the film, a kind of unresolved conclusion.

There are other wild goose chases: Jenny's remark that postmenopausal women don't have REM sleep, for instance. It doesn't seem to be many older people's experience that they don't dream anymore.

How did you find your way to the people you interviewed?

A number of them were old friends. Two of the women in California I've known since I was a teenager. Once I found one person, I found another.

Were there people interviewed that you didn't use?

Yes, there were. And the original interviews are much, much longer. When I first started, I thought, "My God, this film's going to be ten hours long!" Then as I got the other parts of the film together, particular segments of the interviews began to pop out and be relevant.

Have African-American or Puerto Ricans played any role in your earlier films? I don't remember any.

Yes. Roles, but not *as* ethnic-Americans. Blondell Cummings was in *Kristina Talking Pictures*. David Diao, who's Chinese-American, is also in that film. I was interested in an "interesting"-looking bunch of people. But I had no idea of dealing with racial or ethnic social differences.

Jenny (Alice Spivak) in *Privilege*

Was there a particular set of circumstances that led you to deal with race in Privilege*?*

No single circumstance. It was a gradual awareness of, one, the limitations of feminist film theory as it has circulated around Lacanian, neo-Freudian theory; and, two, this incident in my own past that constitutes the flashback in the film, which had been troubling to me. In the back of my mind I always knew that I'd have to deal with it at some point. The so-called postcolonialist cultural writing of the last five years or so moved me toward thinking about a film around that incident.

So Jenny's story is pretty close to yours?

Jenny's *flashback*, yes.

What in particular was it about the incident that made it stay with you so long?

It had to do with a sense that in coming to New York I had been very oblivious to many things around me. Even though I had come from an anarchist background, when it came to self-development and realizing my own potential in the world certain things got excluded: social inequities took a back seat, in terms of consciousness. Some of that had to do with my being in psychotherapy and coming out from under an oppressive marriage and having the chance to produce a lot of work. This incident occurred at the very beginning of this psychic and social advancement, and at first it had no effect on me. It was just something that happened and was very quickly forgotten. But 20 years later, it came back to haunt me with a lot of questions about the kind of life I led then.

One standard thing to say about you, and maybe it's something that you've said about your-

self, is that you relentlessly avoid the personal, the autobiographical; and yet looking back now, it strikes me that your films reveal more about you than many of the films of the sixties that are called *personal actually reveal about their makers. It's because you deal with what you're* thinking about *at any given time, which is always a large part of "who we are."*

Yes.

But I wonder, did you set out at the beginning with the idea of not *making personal film.*

No. I certainly wasn't making "personal film" in the sense Brakhage does, in the way the New American Cinemists did—in terms of personal vision. I had no particular vision. And film-makers complained about my films at the beginning because they weren't "visual"; they didn't play on the retina. My films weren't about making poetic or beautiful images. I got images where I could. And I didn't even do my own shooting! I didn't have a personal touch, in the sense of the painter's hand or a film-maker's eye—although an eye was certainly there, in the way shots were framed. But my imagery was always at the service of a theatrical, emotional realm; *melodrama* was the perfect form for what I was after: the emotional life lived at an extreme of desperation and conflict. I wanted to explore the emotion of personal life, but it was equally important to me that the films be fictionalized in some way and that there would be no central person you identified with. There's always a lot of personal material in my films, but it's diffused, decentralized, contravened by antinarrative techniques.

There's a healthy recognition that even if something is *personal to oneself, one's personality shares concerns, ideas, feelings, whatever, with lots of other people.*

Right.

Your characteristic way of putting texts others have written into the mouths of your characters certainly diffuses—or makes more complex—our sense of their identity. Also, their debates reveal their own connection to certain ideas and *provides the viewer with a précis of issues that you and many other people have been thinking about over a period of time. Did that technique come out of your performance work?*

It may be related to the separation of persona and speech in some of my early dances. A person would recite a story by someone else in the first person, but their body would not be expressing that story: the body would be involved in some other continuity. I was always working for disparities between sound and image. So yes, that carried over into the films. Also, quotation is an expedient way to produce characters: I don't have to worry about psychological credibility. And it gets certain texts out: *someone* has to speak these texts that I'm interested in. It's always a question in my films, who's going to speak what, especially where the characters don't have a direct connection to what or the way in which they speak. In *Privilege*, Carlos speaks a text that does reflect on his life, but a text that because of his class and education he wouldn't normally speak. I've always used my actors as mouthpieces. It's a way of talking about the spoken and the speaker at the same time, and to alternate between them: when Carlos is speaking about color, sitting on the stoop, all of a sudden he says, "¡Hola! ¡Brenda! ¿Qué tal?" as she passes by, and there's a naturalistic scene where we see him as a street person making advances to his neighbor. It's not "realistic," but it can certainly be followed by the spectator. Everyone has that potential to "speak" themselves in some kind of detached way, and also to enact themselves.

Brenda (Blaire Baron) and Carlos (Rico Elias)

I think it's only semi-*realistic because we're always mouthing ideas that we get from other people. . . .*

Yes, absolutely.

But mostly we try to disguise we're doing it.

Right. Right. It happens on a daily basis. You're impressed with something someone has said or that you've read and you incorporate it into your next conversation.

I remember reading about a show at the Collective that you and Berenice Reynaud curated—it was controversial.[3]

Because it covered feminist films and British black films and African films. It swept with a really wide brush. We were taken to task for that.

Who took you to task?

Coco Fusco, in *Screen* and in *Afterimage.*[4]

What was her take on the show?

The tack she took was that white experimental film-makers and psychoanalytic feminists are trying to make a bridge between themselves and black film-makers or blacks in general, in terms of marginalization, and by not examining our own "otherness"—in the panel discussions—we "re-centered" our whiteness. It was a hard lesson, though I still feel Coco's overkill approach was not entirely justified.

In Privilege, *the Yvonne Washington character makes that argument.*

Yes, she's taken up a version of that criticism.

Were you already at work on this project at that point?

Yes. But the Yvonne Washington/Jenny face-off hadn't been written.

How much response to the film by African-Americans have you seen? In Utica, the audience was about 20 percent African-American. It was pretty much the same audience that had, earlier in the fall, seen Sidewalk Stories. *At that earlier screening, I was shocked to realize that some young African-Americans in the audience had a hard time watching the couple in* Sidewalk Stories *kiss, apparently because they weren't romantic enough looking, not young and attractive enough for the movies. So I wondered how middle-aged women discussing menopause would affect a similar student clientele. As it turned out, there seemed to be an appreciation for the kinds of African-American women who show up in the film and the way in which they're presented, and present themselves.*

I've had very little response from nonwhites so far. I took the film to the Frederick Douglass Institute of African American Studies at the University of Rochester. I expected at least a 50–50 balance of races in the audience, but it was an almost totally white crowd. Karen Fields, who is the head of that institute, was very appreciative of the film. In fact, I remember she said, "How did you come to deal with something as explosive as a black on white rape with such restraint?" When I go out with the film, it's pretty much white audiences. After this year is over, when I stop taking care of my official bookings, I'm going to do an outreach and try to bring the film to community groups. I have to find the black audience. The discussions have been really interesting and there's no reason they wouldn't be equally interesting with black audiences.

Is Zeitgeist [Rainer's distributor] *making an effort in this regard?*

They're just taking the bookings as they come in.

You mentioned to Lynn Tillman in a Voice *interview that Novella Nelson had an input into the film. . . .*

I was giving Lynn an example of why the opening title credit says *Privilege*, a film by Yvonne Rainer *and many others*. I've never submitted a film to so many people or asked for so much criticism. So there was a contribution there. In rehearsal, Novella corrected my vernacular. She substituted "dude" for "guy"—things like that. And there were a couple of key moments like the one I mentioned to Lynn: Novella's response to Eldridge Cleaver, for example. She was very involved and made comments along the way.

At one point late in the film, there's a tussle where Jenny and Yvonne Washington laugh and wrestle about being in front of the camera. Jenny feel she's been on the hot seat long enough and that it's Yvonne's turn. Yvonne Washington ends up being in front of the camera and talking about her menopause. This raises the issue of the film-maker exposing herself to the eye of the camera to the degree her interviewees are exposed. You are in front of the camera in the Helen Caldicott reading, but you're not identified. You never to talk openly about your menopause. There seems an implicit irony here.

Well, the film is very artificial. It continually plays with the so-called truth value of documentary and with the authenticity of identity. I'm split across any number of people in this film. You might say the whole film goes on in my own head. Anyone who knows anything about my life will recognize little bits and pieces here and there. But it's not a *roman à clef*, where you figure out, Oh

that's this one and that's that one. It's just a way of using material that has an authentic ring to it. Jenny's menopausal story comes from a particular source, but not from me. And it parallels the story of the Cuban woman at the end who is a real interviewee. My menopausal story is there, here and there, but it's not identified. Is this an issue for you?

Well, only on the level that the real film-maker isn't revealed as clearly as the "film-maker" in the film.

I play Helen Caldicott because it was convenient, and I enjoy making these Hitchcock-like appearances. I also pop up later, making the comment about Brenda not being desired by men.

There *is* an irony in my flu-ravished face. I'm sick every time I shoot a film. Here, I pop up with this smeared lipstick and drawn pallid face and talk about desirability to men! The same kind of irony comes with putting "My Funny Valentine" over my middle-aged face. Of course, it prefigures what is going to be discussed at much greater length in the film. When Novella came in, she actually thought she was going to be handling the camera and be filmed as she was shooting. I wasn't about to go that far in developing her as a literal alter ego. It suffices for me to say in the credits that she is the film-maker, and to have said she's making a documentary film. You either take it or leave it.

I deliberately put Yvonne Washington on the edge of the frame until that key Marxist speech when the camera comes around the couch and finally frames her in close-up. That has a very specific metaphorical meaning about marginalization, as does the shot of the black signer, center screen, signing for the white speaker in the oval on the side.

It had never occurred to me how ludicrous the normal way of including a signer on the TV screen is: the person signing *is in the small hard-to-see place at the corner of the image and the person* talking, *whom we can hear without any image at all, in the big space.*

When it's important to *see* the signer!

It's like the moment in The Man Who Envied Women *where you reposition the slicing of the eyeball from* Un Chien Andalou *so that we realize its violence against* women. *After decades of teaching that film, the gender implications of that shot had never occurred to me!*

Really! Wow. It's always been thought of as the "eye" of the camera, hasn't it?

I'm a little puzzled about the dream where there are two black men looking at The New York Times *want ads and two black women in the bed underneath them.*

Well, Jenny and Yvonne Washington have just been talking about REM sleep. Jenny mentions that she's heard that older people don't have REM sleep any more, and Yvonne Washington protests, "I don't believe that, I still dream. Just the other night I had the weirdest dream . . ." and we're into the dream—or actually it's preceded by another dream image, of Jenny running in terror from something *off*screen. Then we see the two black men looking at the *Times* help wanted ads. The camera pulls away and there's a sign beneath the *Times* that you really can't read: it says, "Lost: memories, muscles, husbands, friends"—all the things that are lost in the aging process or *look* like possible losses. And then you see these two women entwined in bed. It happens too fast (and there's also a voice-over that doesn't quite jive with what you see), but the two *women* in bed are a reference to lesbians not *needing* men: the men are looking for work!

[Laughter] *Hmmm. I missed it.*

I don't think it's that obvious. But *then*, there's a reverse shot of Jenny looking down, suggesting a racial thing, the threat of the white woman coming between the black women. It's a dream within a dream.

The title Privilege *was used by Peter Watkins in a film about rock musicians receiving privilege as a means of siphoning off the political energy of young people into the rock concert phenomenon.*

I don't remember that film.

How did you decide to use that title?

It had to do with Jenny's status in the flashback event. She had privilege and didn't know it, and was also lacking privilege and didn't know it. To her neighbors the Jenny character represents a white norm and a privileged life-style. The aging process has put her in a different relationship to privilege.

Every character in the film can be seen as either having or not having privilege, depending on race, sex, class, age. If they didn't have it, I gave it *to* them. I privileged Digna to be the commentator,

Digna (Gabriella Farrar), Robert (Dan Berkey), and Jenny (Alice Spivak): *Privilege*

to be more omniscient than Jenny, and to be able to follow Jenny around without being seen. "Privilege" is a crucial term in the film, a kind of prism through which all these issues—and techniques—can be observed.

At the end, you do an interesting thing with the credits, particularly given the line we see during the credits: "UTOPIA: the more impossible it seems, the more necessary it becomes." You undercut between the textual credits and what I assume is the wrap party for the film—you also include additional interview information. Do you see the party as a kind of momentary Utopia?

Yeah.

Is the process of making a film your attempt to model Utopian interaction?

Originally, the ending was going to be a dozen postmenopausal women in bright red lipstick and black leather jackets, pouring out of a bar, trying to zip up their jackets [laughter]. It was going to be some climactic moment attacking stereotypes: these raunchy, spunky women. And then I kind of abandoned that and thought, "Oh, well, maybe there'll be a dance." I thought I'd show all these women dancing to "Sounds of Soweto" or something, and then that seemed too corny. And finally, I decided, why not document what was already going to happen. I invited all the interviewees to the party. Only a few could come. Actually, Shirley Triest, the tall thin woman, flew from California, it was the first time in her life she's been out of California.

Really!

Yes. I was very touched by that.

At the end of the film, just before we see the wrap party, Yvonne asks Jenny, "So, did you ever make it with Brenda?" and Jenny says, "Hell, no! I was terrified of women." That, the two women in bed in the one dream, and the textual statement quoted in one of the stills for Privilege*—"The most remarkable thing was the silence that emanated from friends and family regarding details of my single middleage. When I was younger, my sex life had been the object of all kinds of questioning, from purient curiosity to solicitous concern. Now that I did not appear to be looking for a man, the state of my desires seemed of no interest to anyone"—leads to my last question: What* is *the state of your desires?*

I've become a lesbian.

Ah.

I mean I can only say that now because I'm deeply involved with someone. But for the last five

years it's been on my mind. I've gone through these back bends to find some way of describing a state of nonactive, unrealized sexual identity. I did a lecture in Australia where I called myself "a lapsed heterosexual" and an "a-woman" and "a political lesbian." At the level of politics, and emotion, my empathy was with lesbians. But I was settling into a celibate life. I didn't know how to proceed.

That's something I want to learn more about in my next film. I want to interview lesbians who *became* lesbians in middle age. That's the stereotype: a woman is not wanted by men anymore; therefore, she turns to women.

That's a stereotype I've not heard, actually.

Oh? It's in the culture. I don't think I invented it, and I really want to investigate it: *Is* it a stereotype? *Privilege* does raise all the stereotypes about desirability and women getting "old" before men get "old," and the old maid stereotype.

I guess the stereotype I've heard is that old maids are lesbians whether they know it or not—though I'm certainly not in touch with the conventional stereotyping of lesbians.

What's very interesting to me is that the instant you get involved with someone of your own sex, it's like crossing the Rubicon! I mean, suddenly, I'm not a "political lesbian" (well, I *am* a political lesbian), I'm a lesbian. I felt I couldn't *say* that before, which was odd, because years ago there was a time I couldn't say I was a feminist because I thought, "Oh, a feminist is a political *activist*, not just someone who makes art." I got past that, and have been an avowed feminist for years.

You know, this is the first time I've uttered all this. No one has asked me directly.

Privilege *gave me the sense you wanted to be asked, but I wasn't sure I'd have the nerve to ask you.*

I'm glad you did. It's the beginning—for me —of talking about it. Which means the beginning of fomenting a film.

▪ Scott MacDonald is collecting a second volume of interviews to follow his *Critical Cinema*, published by the University of California Press, Berkeley.

1. Alice Anne Parker, *Understand Your Dreams: 1,001 Basic Dream Images and How to Interpret Them* (New York: H.J. Kramer, 1991).
2. Anne Severson, "Don't Get Too Near the Big Chakra," *Spare Rib*, no. 20 (February 1974); reprinted in *Spare Rib Reader*, ed. Marsha Rowe (London: Penguin, 1982), pp. 312–18.
3. "Sexism, Colonialism, Misrepresentation," at the Collective for Living Cinema. The program and related papers were published in *Motion Picture*, Summer/Autumn 1990, by the Collective, 41 White Street, New York, N.Y. 10013.
4. Coco Fusco, "Fantasies of Oppositionality," *Screen*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Autumn 1988) and *Afterimage*, vol. 16, no. 5 (December 1988).
5. "A Woman Called Yvonne," *Village Voice*, Jan. 15, 1991, p. 56.

(Yvonne Rainer's films are available through Zeitgeist in New York; Anne Severson's through Canyon Cinema in San Francisco.)

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Edited by Martin M. Winkler

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Reviews

The Grifters

Producer: Martin Scorsese. Director: Stephen Frears. Screenplay: Donald E. Westlake, from the novel by Jim Thompson. Photography: Oliver Stapleton. Music: Elmer Bernstein. Editor: Mick Audsley. Miramax.

At first sight there is something implausible about this encounter between Jim Thompson, the American writer of hermetic pulp thrillers, and Stephen Frears, the English director who made his name with dramas rooted in contemporary England. Since Thompson has in recent years gained the critical attention that he never had in his lifetime, and since Frears became commercially hot as soon as he won the duel of *Les Liaisons dangereuses* both in speed and skill, it would be easy to dismiss *The Grifters* as the spawn of fashion. For anyone who admired Frears primarily for the seriousness and political awareness of *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, and *Prick Up Your Ears*, it would also be easy to see his subsequent work as a decline, first into the period trappings of *Dangerous Liaisons* and now into the faux-50s *noir*ishness of *The Grifters*. But the film itself argues otherwise.

It is true that Thompson's novels, despite their indelibly American idiom, rarely if ever seem to belong to any specific time or place. Characters act and react—invariably with avarice, deceit, suspicion, fear, anger, bitterness, or lust—in an often implausible world of their own. What distinguishes Thompson from other pulp authors is his willingness to try new approaches, from a different character narrating each chapter in *The Kill-Off* to the interleaving of Joycean monologues at the end of *A Hell of a Woman* to the hellish semifantasy at the end of *The Getaway*. Both *Pop. 1280* and *The Killer Inside Me* are written in the first person and have the same basic theme—a dumb-seeming cop who is a ruthless killer—yet the former is black farce, the latter grim horror. *The Grifters* is stylistically more straightforward and written in the third person, but it differs from Thompson's other novels by its almost equal treatment of three main characters as they act out a slow dance of death.

This chamber-music aspect of the book is very much in harmony with Frears's approach to filmmaking. Although Frears first made a big impression in this country with *My Beautiful Laundrette*, which gives the effect of a wide-ranging narrative because it has seven major and obviously varied characters—including Pakistanis at different stages of assimilation—he had worked mainly and extensively on films for television. (His first movie feature was *Gumshoe*, in 1972; his second, *The Hit*, came ten years later.) Even a television movie with as much visual flair and spatial dynamic as *Bloody Kids* (1980) focuses sharply throughout on just two main characters. *The Hit* is a death dance of four characters; *Prick Up Your Ears*, a death dance for two (despite Vanessa Redgrave in a third, catalytic role); and *Dangerous Liaisons*, a death dance for three, in some ways a natural precursor of *The Grifters*.

That list skips over *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, which seems to confirm Frears's reputation as a symphonic-scale film-maker with a political thrust. For the latter, Frears has made no secret of his distaste for Thatcherite England; all the same, he did not write the script of *Sammy and Rosie* (nor of any other film), and only here, only at the end, does a political statement come to the foreground. As to the scale of *Sammy and Rosie*, consider the much-remarked scene in which the three main couples, having sex in separate places, are united on the split screen—a sextette, as Mae West would have called it. Echoed by early scenes in *The Grifters* that bring all three of the spatially separate main characters together, this split-screen device suggests that Frears is focusing on what's most important to him, a handful of people and their interactions.

To some extent, of course, this focus can be attributed to almost any narrative, but its usual limitations can be seen in two other recent crime films, Peter Medak's *The Krays* and Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs*. The relations between the Kray brothers and their Mum in the former and between FBI agent Clarice Starling and psychotic psychiatrist Hannibal Lecter in the latter are indeed central, but they are cushioned and to different degrees smothered by a profusion of extraneous events and details. *The Grifters* depends almost en-

tirely on the shifting relations between Roy (John Cusack), Lilly (Anjelica Huston) and Myra (Annette Bening: Moira in the book).

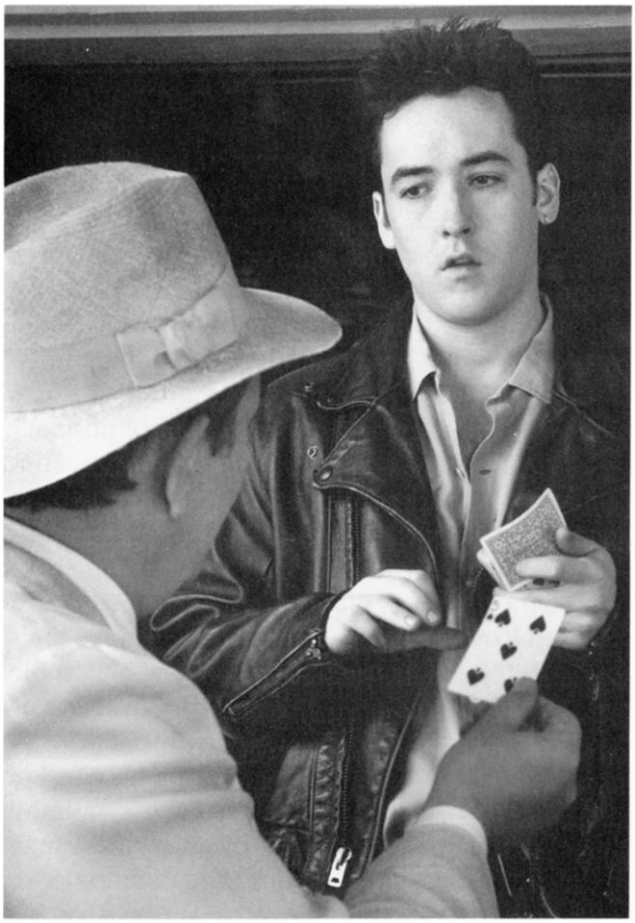
The film begins by smoothly introducing the three characters. Lilly works for a mobster, placing bets at racetracks to lower the odds on long shots. Usually she works in the East, but having been sent to La Jolla she decides to look up her son Roy, who lives in a Los Angeles hotel. (She gave birth to him when she was 14, and they have not seen each other in eight years.) Roy works as a salesman but is amassing money by means of small-scale cons. His girlfriend, Myra, is a somewhat older woman who is unaware at first of his criminal sideline, just as he is unaware that she is the former accomplice of a big-time con man and now gets by with judicious hustling.

The action begins with what seems like a minor incident. Just before Lilly arrives, a bartender whom Roy tried to swindle hits him in the belly with a baseball bat. Lilly realizes that he has a serious internal injury and gets him rushed to a hospital. There she and Myra meet, with immediate hostility. Delayed from reaching the racetrack after visiting Roy, Lilly fails to bet on a longshot that wins; the mobster, Bobo Justus (Pat Hingle), punishes her by burning her hand with his cigar. This sequence is acted with such bluff menace by Hingle and such contained fear by Huston (in contrast to her toughness elsewhere) that it transcends its main function of inserting two plot points.

After Roy leaves the hospital, he and Myra take a trip to La Jolla. She spots him doing a con, reveals her own background, and asks him to partner her in a big-time con; but he refuses. Angry, she says that Lilly must be behind the refusal and accuses him of a more than filial interest in his mother; he hits her and they break up. Meanwhile Myra has discovered that Lilly has a stash she has siphoned off from Bobo's bet money. Lilly is warned that Bobo knows about her stash (having been tipped off by Myra) and she immediately drives off to Phoenix, followed by Myra. (Plot point 1 from the punishment sequence: Lilly's fear of Bobo, which drives her to immediate flight.) That night Myra gets into Lilly's motel room and starts to strangle her. Roy is summoned to Phoenix to identify Lilly's body—shot in the face—and he does so, although he notices there is no burn on the hand (plot point 2 from the punishment sequence): it is Myra, shot by Lilly. He returns to his Los Angeles hotel to find Lilly about to walk off with his stash, and there is a final confrontation that might seem ludicrous if it were not so well acted and directed. Lilly explains that she needs the money because she's on the run from Bobo. Roy says that the money won't last that long, she'll have to get a job sometime and she might as well start now. She then says, "What if I'm not your mother?" and moves in on him with eyes glinting and lips ready to kiss. As he's distracted, she swings the case full of money at his head; it smashes a glass he's holding, driving a sliver of glass into his neck, while the case flies open and scatters the money. As Roy bleeds to death, Lilly leans over him sobbing—and picking up the money. She walks out whimpering and drives off.

Most of the changes to the book serve to tighten the focus on the central trio. There are three obvious excisions: a flashback to Roy's relations with Lilly when he was a boy; Roy's arrest for using a punchboard in a bar; and almost everything connected with his sales job. (Some of these scenes were apparently cut after filming, since the publicity notes include cast listings for a much younger Roy and Lilly and for Roy's sales boss.) The book also contains a long digression involving Carol, a survivor of Dachau who is now a nurse at the hospital where Roy is treated: Lilly hires her to take care of Roy after he goes home and Roy eventually seduces her. Her Dachau experience not only dates the book but also clashes with Thompson's ahistorical fictive world, and Westlake reduces her role to little more than a deftly invented scene in which Lilly asks her to take care of Roy, and Roy sardonically tells Carol that Lilly really wants her in his hotel room so that he can fuck her (in place of Myra). Here and elsewhere the hostility between Lilly and Myra is made stronger in the film than in the book, preparing for Myra's hint at incest and her plot against Lilly.

One change adds to the effectiveness of the film while making the plot implausible—though I became aware of this only at a second viewing. In the book, Moira knows that Lilly has a stash but not where it's hidden; she gets a friend to call Lilly with a false report that Bobo has learned about the stash, so that Lilly will go on the run taking the money with her. In the film, Myra spies on Lilly at the racetrack, sees the stash in the trunk of her car and then (offscreen) tips off Bobo. But this makes no sense: with Bobo's goons after Lilly and the stash, Myra has no hope of getting away with the



Roy (John Cusack) in *The Grifters*

money herself. Still, the change allows Frears to treat the viewer to a comedic ballet. As soon as Lilly gets the warning call, she walks out of the French doors of her ground floor hotel room, moving her long legs and high-heeled shoes with what looks like unflustered deliberation—while in her room the television still plays and her friend's voice still squawks from the dangling phone. After Lilly drives off, Myra's head rises into view behind the wheel of a parked car, and she too drives off. Next two goons arrive, wordlessly enter the hotel room, look around and go out, carefully closing the French doors. Then Roy, who had called Lilly earlier to arrange a visit, taps on the door, taps more impatiently, walks along and peers through the windows, and flings his arms and body around in annoyance before leaving.

The film has one major addition that misfires: a lengthy flashback showing how Myra and her mentor conned an oilman by pretending they would multiply his investment in a (nonexistent) stock market scam. Possibly this was included to boost Annette Bening's role—there are scenes elsewhere in which her sexuality is displayed with borderline relevance—but the overall effect is to make Myra a more inconsistent character than the Moira of the book. The digression also emphasizes the film's one noticeable implausibility: on two or three occasions Lilly and Myra are meant to be mistaken for each other, and although attempts have been made to give Huston and Bening a similar look and even walk, they remain physically very different.

Still, these weaknesses may in a peculiar way be appropriate. Inconsistent plots are commonplace even among Grade A thrillers of the 1940s and 50s, such as *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Big Sleep*. Also, without aiming at pastiche, *The Grifters* suggests some of the logistical tactics of the best B pictures, which had to solve problems with ingenuity and short cuts rather than money. (It may even have been as a deliberate nod to those unpolished thrillers that Frears chose to use a take in Bobo's hotel suite in which the microphone is visible.) It was certainly fitting to have the score composed by Elmer Bernstein, who began his screen career in 1953 with *Robot Monster* and has ranged over most popular Hollywood genres from *The Ten Commandments* to *Ghostbusters*. The $3 million budget, extraordinarily low for a major feature today, has been used to ingenious effect in the planning of both interiors and location scenes. The studio interiors have a fascinating seediness created in part by the use of drab greens, browns and other shades enhanced with chiaroscuro, while the characters are generally kept in fuller lighting. The sets and clothing do not assert any particular time period, so that they could belong almost as easily to Thompson's 1950s as to the present. Although there is no attempt at period reconstruction in the location exteriors, the daytime settings are given a flat, slightly washed-out appearance that matches the temporal ambiguity of the interiors—and keeps the focus on the central characters.

This focus, along with the general economy of effect, sets *The Grifters* apart from recent remakes and reinventions of *film noir*, such as *No Way Out*, *Miami Blues*, and *After Dark, My Sweet*, as well as from older *noirs* such as *The Killing* (scripted by Thompson) and *The Asphalt Jungle* that involve larger numbers of characters. Even vintage *noirs* with small casts, such as *Detour* and *Gun Crazy*, depend on a linear trajectory in which a more or less innocent character is gradually entangled in

guilt. In *The Grifters* none of the three characters is innocent, and their trajectory is a converging spiral.

If Thompson at his most effective makes a good fit with Frears's economy of means and tight focus, the value of the result is still in question. The film's narrative retains Thompson's facile nihilism, while its look emphasizes the isolation of the characters from society and history. How can *The Grifters* be anything more than a skillful but forgettable entertainment?

It's easy to overestimate the impact of social relevance in a narrative film. At one extreme, the insistence on a particular attitude or political view is likely to be completely divorced from the impact of the narrative. A viewer can thrill to the triumph of the sailors in *Potemkin* without being swayed an iota toward communism, or root for the Klan at the climax of *Birth of a Nation* while remaining appalled at the film's racism. In any case, before preaching to the unconverted, film-makers must solve the problem of reaching the unconverted, few of whom may choose to see a film that is clearly an assault on their views.

More commonly, relevance appears in narrative films as an injection into entertainment. The dose may vary widely, as may its sincerity (within limits, social awareness adds emotional appeal), but usually the aim is to make the entertainment carry a message with which it has little or no integral connection. The casting of blacks in positive or heroic roles (usually secondary) is a less persuasive means of countering stereotyped attitudes than showing blacks in a range of human complexity, as in Spike Lee's films or Burnett's *To Sleep with Anger*. Even the political strand of *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, which culminates in a bitter satire of Margaret Thatcher, has only a tenuous link with the relations of the main characters, and can therefore be discounted. The injection of such elements may be a good and necessary way of expressing anger and frustration, but its power of persuasion is low.

The Grifters not only lacks social relevance but at first sight appears retrograde. Thompson's novels reflect the automatic sexism of three or four decades ago: although the female characters are in general no more duplicitous, mean, or vicious than the males, they are nearly always subordinate, alternating between willing sex objects and nuisances; and wives are invariably termagants. In *The Grifters* Myra is a willing sex object and also becomes more duplicitous than Roy, though with cause—what she sees as Roy's hostile alliance with Lilly. But neither Myra nor Lilly is subordinate: both are strong and resourceful. Roy is the least aggressive and most cautious of the trio, keeping one foot on safe ground as he maintains his sales job; to some extent, he is the sex object over which the other two fight.

The film focuses tightly not only on the three main characters but also, more than the book, on the marginal world they inhabit. It eliminates all the passages in which "normal" life dominates—notably the daily routine of nurse Carol and Roy's promotion to sales manager. In the film, "normal" people are seen only briefly, always as dupes, conveniences, or irritations, while the central trio are allowed some sustained or intermittent traits of humanity, from Myra's cheerful delight in her sexuality to the glimmers of filial and maternal concern between Roy and Lilly. The players all make their somewhat mercurial characters believable: while Huston brings off the most challenging shifts of tone, Cusack conveys Roy's public confidence and private vulnerability with much subtlety.

Of course, many crime films elicit sympathy with their criminals, sometimes by giving them such traits as courage, skill, humor, and camaraderie, sometimes by the same narrative means that involve us in the ride of the Klan in *Birth of a Nation*, and sometimes by emphasizing the unworthiness of the victims—anonymous banks or ruthless businessmen. But these strategies recur so often that they have lost their bite. *The Grifters* cuts deeper. Roy, Myra, and Lilly are never partners in the same crimes; their bond is that of a family, and so are their disputes. Mother wants son to settle down to a decent job; fiancee wants him to be more ambitious; son wants both of them to ease up on him; mother and fiancee can't stand each other. Ironically, money is never an issue between them until the personal disputes boil over; but then, because their lives are based on the acquisition of money, the issue becomes deadly. Lilly's appeal to Roy for his stash is justified, and Roy's stated reason for refusing makes sense, but neither has any power against their ineradicable habit of accumulation.

No heavy irony underlines this transposition of the "normal" and criminal worlds. Frears has a brisk style that avoids the digressions and excesses of such English romantics as John Boorman and Ken Russell and is particularly effective in taking the viewer inside unfamiliar worlds as if they were

familiar—Pakistani, gay, and anarchist communities of London in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *Prick Up Your Ears*, and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, Spain as seen by English criminals in *The Hit*, eithteenth-century France in *Dangerous Liaisons*. In *The Grifters* Frears takes us into the world of petty criminals as if it were familiar—as in fact it is. We can read what we want into this familiarity, from individual specifics of petty lies and cheating to our society's general obsession with self and acquisition: the film is not a moral or political tract. But this ironic subtext, working through the well-crafted chamber music of Thompson's and Frears's trio, makes *The Grifters* an entertainment that reverberates long after it is over.

WILLIAM JOHNSON

▪ William Johnson is our New York Editor.

Vincent and Theo

Director: Robert Altman. Producer: Ludi Boeken. Script: Julian Mitchell. Photography: Jean Lepine. Editing: Françoise Coispeau and Geraldine Peroni. Music: Gabriel Yared. Hemdale.

Robert Altman's *Vincent and Theo* will come and go with critical acclaim, but not much popular following. I write this review as a corrective to that expectation. With the exception of Peter Watkins's superlative *Edvard Munch*, *Vincent and Theo* is the best film of its kind (biography of famous artist) I have ever seen. There are many kinds of Altman films, and I want to situate this one among the many. To speak personally—as a critic should—I am not much taken with the more popular Altman films: *Nashville*, *M*A*S*H*, *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*. And there are arguably "awful" Altman films: *A Wedding* and *Beyond Therapy*, for example. My Altman favorites are the more obscure and experimental of his films: *Images* and *Three Women*, parts of *Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean* and *Fool for Love*, and, to a lesser extent, *The Long Goodbye* and *Thieves Like Us*. Altman has survived long enough to be able to pick and choose his projects and to carve out a personal terrain, as he has done with the many filmed adaptations of contemporary plays by Sam Shepard, David Raab, and others. Now he has made a film about the Van Gogh brothers, another mode, perhaps, of using film to bring fine arts to the popular consciousness.

I admire the risks Altman has taken in *Vincent and Theo*, risks inherent in the form of the project (where the famous works of an artist so dwarf the personal life that one has to resort to inventing controversy and dramatic material to keep the personal life interesting, while still finding ways to show the works) and risks to differentiate his film from *Lust for Life* and the more recent, more cerebral *Vincent* by Paul Cox, a film that takes the letters between the brothers to be the whole subject. In Altman's film neither the letters nor the finished paintings amount to much and are rarely divulged, quoted, or shown. What, then, is the subject of Altman's film?

I contend that the real subject is love between men, beginning with male bonding in a general sense and moving toward brother love, even an attempt to depict twinning, the love-hate relationships of twins and enemy brothers so well described by René Girard in his study "The Sacrificial Crisis," finally suggesting in the side-by-side headstones a soul-mating that goes deeper than recent twin depictions such as David Cronenberg's Mantle brothers in *Dead Ringers* and Peter Greenaway's Deuce brothers in *A Zed and Two Noughts*. I contend, then, that Altman's *Vincent and Theo* has more in common with a film like, say, John Cassavetes's *Love Streams* (in which a brother and sister are perfect for each other and ideally suited, but doomed by incest taboo and cultural constraints to lose themselves in catastrophic relationships with others) than with a film like *Lust for Life*. It also has a family resemblance with *Three Women*, of course, with its eerie merging and reflection of personas.

One of the first risks Altman takes in his playing with narrative structure is the false prologue, never book-ended by a matching sequence at the end of the film. This prologue situates the film in two different times, that of the record auction of a Van Gogh painting at Christie's in London and that of the two brothers in the middle or muddle of things, when Theo confesses that money supposedly sent to Vincent by their father was in fact sent by him, their dialogue competing with the continuous sound of the auction in London.

Situating the film this way in two different times is a way of defining irony, itself a trope that

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straddles two different times. But what kind of irony? Are we to presume that the poverty under which Vincent labored his entire life is being contrasted with the commercialization of art, especially posthumous art, an economy that has nothing to do with the artist's life or intentions? I think not. In fact, had Vincent been as popular in his lifetime as the Corot and Millet he despises, he still would have been mad and Theo still would have had syphilis. I content that the irony is much more internal and structural, that there is in fact a book-ending *within* this false prologue, one in which the disclosure of Theo is bracketed by one kind of gallery (the auction at Christie's) at the beginning and by another kind of gallery, the art gallery in which Theo is an apprentice manager/curator. It's this second gallery that serves as the springboard *into* the rest of the film, that launches the "real time" of the rest of the film. What the irony of this false prologue also does, of course, is free the film from any fixed point of view, any first-scene fixity or identification for the spectator. By prologue's end, the film is neither from Theo's point of view nor Vincent's, but rather an alternation, the points of which are fixed by Altman but between which the characters are allowed some brilliant acting, miming, and gesturing room.

The alternation operates as intellectual montage of associative editing (gallery to gallery, mirror to mirror, mask to mask, one woman leaving one brother to another woman leaving the other brother). All very cerebral stuff. But the heady precision of such editing is nicely countered by the ensemble acting of Tim Roth as Vincent, Paul Rhys as Theo, and three unforgettable women's roles: Jip Wijngaarden as the prostitute Sien, Anne Canovas as Theo's girlfriend Marie, and Johanna Ter Steege as Theo's money-grubbing survivor wife Jo. What exemplifies the ensemble acting throughout the film are not only the beautiful loving close-ups, but the nervous attention to detail for spontaneity's sake: a sudden eruptive twitter of a laugh from Vincent; the way Sien wipes her underarms, smokes a cigarette, or flares up in anger with eyes and nostrils; Jo devouring every last bite of her food while supposedly listening to Theo pouring his heart's pain out in confession; Vincent licking paint off his fingers, drinking turpentine, grinning from what looks like the prosthetic scaffolding of horrible teeth. These actors mime, pout, gesture brilliantly, all for the purpose of conveying "realism," which is to say candor, intimacy, spontaneity, unrehearsed expression. The montage is intellectual, the acting is disarmingly refreshing, and the balance between the two makes the film more "alive" than most art documentaries would ever dare to be.

Vincent dares to draw the prostitute while she is on her break from posing. She coughs, wipes her underarms, sniffs, defecates in a pan with no regard for his possible watching. She looks in a mirror to discover that he is looking at her, her reflection and his voyeurism both present in the mirror, and with the accompaniment of an unexplained whinny of a horse, she erupts: "Are you drawing me? You're not allowed to. You can draw me if I model, not if I'm myself." But this smart remark is immediately undercut the next time we see these two together. They're at an exhibit, a performance sculpture of ships and snow behind glass. Sien says naively to Vincent: "It's so real. Look at the ships. One day you'll be able to paint a ship just like that." She who is closer to him than anyone except Theo can mistake the innovator who would later be credited with founding the style known as Expressionism with an inferior painter who one day might be able to paint a ship that looks real! But her naive remark is not left long either. We're precluded from "judging" her, because her next remark is once again provocative. Her daughter Maria enters the landscape of simulacra and pees. Sien explains: "She thought it was the beach. Well, that's art."

Vincent cares for her, accepts her abuse, houses her and her daughter, takes care of the baby while the mother goes to work. He is, thus, not portrayed as a selfish narcissistic painter who preys on his models à la Picasso, but rather as a gentle man who tenderly adopts the woebegone of the world—whether out of passion or compassion is not clear, but he is depicted as a house-husband for as long as she will stay with him.

The next alternating cuts have to do with mirrors and paint colors. Marie fingerpaints her neck in a mirror. Theo sucks the mark. She paints her breast. Theo sucks it. The dominant color is red. Cut to Vincent and the color is yellow. He stands in front of a mirror, holding Sien's baby. Another sequence of alternating shots concerns leavings: Sien fights with Vincent and leaves him; Marie, upset that Theo won't have sex with her because of his syphilis, leaves him. Then back to mirrors and paints again, this time to show grief and pain, where before it was to convey play and eroticism.

Theo (Paul Rhys) and Vincent (Tim Roth)

Vincent is shown with a self-portrait and a mirror. Cut to Theo standing before a mirror. Cut to Vincent painting his face white. Cut to Theo painting his face red. Theo slaps his own face with powder puff and applies women's toilette or masquerade. Vincent alters his face with paint as well, but his face is more that of a clown, more of a death's head mask. While this sort of self-deprecation seems to come naturally to Vincent, the more repressed and more aspiring Theo also seems the more shattered. But the important point for the spectator is in the acquired information across the cuts. These two are leading twin existences, unbeknownst to either of them, but brought to us as privileged images.

The portrayal of Vincent outdoors among cows mooing and darting through wavy wheat fields, fidgeting, moving himself and his canvas, is worth mentioning for how it gets around ever showing actual brush work on the canvas by showing Vincent as extremely oral and visceral. He licks paints off his fingers, later reinforced by his drinking turpentine. Like an arrested infant, he will put anything and everything into his mouth. Altman seems here to be suggesting one possible explanation for Vincent's madness.

What is most grown-up about Vincent is his critical eye, always deflected to discover a more interesting angle on things. A model shows Vincent a frame. He looks at her instead of at the frame. Many of Altman's scenes begin with views in a mirror, but Vincent's eye cuts right through simulacra and framed images. And while Altman ushers forth such simulacra in some scenes, he also "corrects" others, especially the outdoors scenes, unbeknownst to Vincent. Giant sunflowers fill the frame. A handheld camera runs in jagged fashion. Vincent is photographed awry, almost in "Dutch tilt" or diagonal. Altman thus conveys the vertigo of the windswept fields of Arles, not by assuming Vincent's point of view, but rather by collapsing him as a tiny figure caught within the landscape most associated with him. Altman thus deanthropomorphizes the frame. Vincent's shirt blows uncontrollably. His canvas blows and threatens to warp or fly away. Vincent is forced finally to pick some flowers

and take them indoors, a wonderful ironic touch on the part of Altman, conveying both the menace Vincent felt face-to-face with this landscape without taking Vincent's point of view to do so, but also conveying how sometimes to portray nature one must flee the vicissitudes of nature and seek artificial shelter.

The sequences involving Vincent and Gauguin are the weakest of the film for me. History has never detailed accurately this tormented relationship, and Altman seems content to explain it away as Gauguin's bourgeois and foppish mien, his jealousy of Vincent, and his self-centeredness. Unfortunately, in these Gauguin sequences Theo is absent from the film for a long time. The film makes it clear that Gauguin was intended to be a stand-in brother to Vincent; Theo even pays Gauguin to be Theo to Vincent. That point made, however, the character of Gauguin never comes off for me—I am always aware that this is an actor.

Still, some minor scenes during these sequences are touching and memorable. Vincent is with a prostitute named Vivian, and this dialogue ensues:

VINCENT: I don't know why I bother to do this. I'm completely impotent by now.
VIVIAN: So am I.
VINCENT: So, would you marry me?
VIVIAN: No.
VINCENT: Just a thought.

This brief exchange recapitulates Vincent's earlier relationship with Sien, the lack of satisfying sexuality compensated for by friendship, good humor, and always the offer by Vincent to marry the woman or take care of her.

In a moment of madness, Vincent paints this message on the walls of his room:

I AM THE HOLY SPIRIT.
I AM WHOLE IN SPIRIT.

An admirable translation, but the French is more complicit:

JE SUIS LE SAINT ESPRIT.
JE SUIS L'ENCEINT ESPRIT.

In the French the word that has been translated as "whole" actually carries the meaning of "pregnant." For the impotent man who imagines himself as pregnant, this wish to be feminine is an answer to the earlier scene in which Theo powder-puffed his face with woman's make-up. As though to emphasize this point, the next scene is one in which Vincent fingerpaints Vivian (answer to Theo's ealier scene of fingerpainting with Maria), but rendered in a kind of "madonna with child" posing.

This same kind of answered gesturing, always unbeknownst to the characters themselves, spans the various cuts. Vincent does finally cut his ear, but the potential sensationalism of that historical event is undercut or deflected by the greater violence done to his self-portrait in a mirror first. The broken mirror is the scene of exhibition for the self-mutilation, the image preceding the body. And when we switch to Theo and Johanna, we see Johanna's brother Andries feeling his ear, as though in empathy with the faraway Vincent.

Another empathy: Vincent in the wavy wheatfields where he shoots himself paints a dark sky that contrasts with the blue sky we see, then seems to be destroying the canvas with little gouges in the form of small v's or carets. He is in fact painting birds, the birds that aren't there yet for us, but are there later for Theo, when he walks away from the funeral of his brother to wander his brother's landscape, and a whole flock of dark birds swoops up skyward at Theo's approach.

The irony of the film's last sequences derives from Vincent's apparent "cure" at Beaucaire (finally, he is fed and cared for, has freedom to wander the fields and paint, seems calm, then inexplicably shoots himself) versus the inexorable downfall of Theo, the way he enshrines his brother in a mausoleum-like room of his house devoted to a museum of Vincent's paintings; the madness that accompanies his last-stage syphilis. Finally, naked and cowering in a prison setting, Theo calls out for his brother, just as Vincent had called out for Theo in cutting his ear.

Theo's disintegration, madness, and death are hurried, rushed into several quick, emblematic shots, and seem anticlimactic to me, not because of their content, but because the entire structure of the film has been based on alternating sequences, and there is no more Vincent with whom to alternate. So, while the last stages of Theo are meant to look horrible, they feel hollow, overly dramatic, like the endings of artists in Ken Russell films.

I come away from *Vincent and Theo* impressed with the mix of intellectual montage and ensemble acting, but also surprised that Vincent is in no way the main character of the film, that indeed there is no "authority" of point of view in either of the

brothers. The cutting of the ear is deflected through style, Vincent shooting himself is rendered almost comic by the long walk to the cafe, every historically verified dramatic moment is expressed matter-of-factly, while every little gesture, smile, bodily movement, or tic is exalted to the point of being sweetly lyrical. The twinning of the brothers Van Gogh is Altman's major imaginative theme, and he expresses it with consummate skill.

WILLIAM F. VAN WERT

▪ William F. Van Wert teaches at Temple University and has won the O. Henry Prize for one of his short stories.

FQ's Annual Book Survey (continued)

History

The Power and the Glitter
The Hollywood-Washington Connection

By Ronald Brownstein. New York: Pantheon, 1990. $24.95

Brownstein's title seems to confront us with a challenging take on the notion of who wields political clout in the United States: that the power lies with Hollywood and the glitter with Washington. While not entirely original, this notion suggests the influence of Hollywood on the political scene in the US and the way Washington is as much a tinsel-town as the fabled Los Angeles community ever was. Unfortunately, little beyond the title pursues this slant. Rather, the book maintains that political power rests in Washington, and that members of the movie industry have primarily been enlisted in support of Washington power, typically in helping candidates get elected. Of course, a handful of Hollywood stars have sought and been elected to political office, but they remain exceptions, especially in Brownstein's survey of movie people and the Washington scene.

Brownstein is little concerned with movies as such. Indeed, actual film titles are few and far between, and discussions of individual movies even rarer—so much so that none of the film titles mentioned in the text are even indexed. (The index itself has other problems—Spike Lee and Bill Cosby, for instance, are mentioned on p. 173 in the text, but this mention escapes the index.) This lack of concern with movies makes one wince when Don Siegel's marvelous caper-film, *The Killers*, which features Ronald Reagan in his last role in a Hollywood production, is described as a western (219). The notion of film that operates within the book is expressed early on, that Hollywood is "a community more typically known for the manufacture of fantasy than the shaping of political reality . . ." (4) That films have a political content, let alone a political impact, almost entirely escapes Brownstein. Certainly the notion that films have, indeed, very much shaped political reality, if not the image of individual candidates (except Ronald Reagan!) is nowhere recognized. This leads to some unfortunate simplifications on Brownstein's part, not simply of movies and of the institution of the cinema, but of the motivations of movie people for overt political involvement: "Compelled to compromise constantly in the making of films, Hollywood figures tend to veer toward the other extreme and become purists in politics, as a sort of psychic compensation; people in the industry have always looked to politics as an arena that allows them to demonstrate that they really have deep convictions about something, even if their artistic choices don't display them." (117)

Some of this simplification also arises from Brownstein's choice to begin his survey of politics in the movie community literally with Hollywood, that is, when the center of film production decisively shifted to the West Coast and solidified itself under the direction of the major studios' movie moguls. Thus in this otherwise impressive reading of the secondary literature about film, Brownstein nowhere recognizes the work of, for instance, Lary

brothers. The cutting of the ear is deflected through style, Vincent shooting himself is rendered almost comic by the long walk to the cafe, every historically verified dramatic moment is expressed matter-of-factly, while every little gesture, smile, bodily movement, or tic is exalted to the point of being sweetly lyrical. The twinning of the brothers Van Gogh is Altman's major imaginative theme, and he expresses it with consummate skill.

WILLIAM F. VAN WERT

▪ William F. Van Wert teaches at Temple University and has won the O. Henry Prize for one of his short stories.

FQ's Annual Book Survey (continued)

History

The Power and the Glitter
The Hollywood-Washington Connection

By Ronald Brownstein. New York: Pantheon, 1990. $24.95

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May (*Screening Out the Past*) or Kay Sloan (*The Loud Silents*). His lack of concern for movies also cost him a crucial work in the literature about the relation between film and politics, between Hollywood and Washington: Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*. And if movies are explicitly equated with Hollywood, the book also implicitly equates movies and television, as in this assertion:

> Politicians always had a mystique in the movie industry because their world seemed weightier, more substantial than Hollywood's dominion of images. Television diluted that cachet by revealing politicians to be no less subservient to shallow imagery. Once television compelled politicians to primp and posture like actors, it became increasingly common for Hollywood to consider them not so much heroes as ungainly amateurs trying to unlock secrets the stars intuitively knew. (137)

For Brownstein's purposes there is little difference between the theatrical experience and the home screen, as the creative centers of both are in Hollywood; the entertainment industry subsumes any notion of film or television. And beginning the book with a scene, so to speak, of Michael Eisner, head of Walt Disney Studios which is equally active of late in film and television, playing host at a fundraiser for Sen. Bill Bradley, we too experience a blurring of the lines between the two forms.

Yet better Brownstein's lack of familiarity with film as a singular site than the posturing and primping that passes for political analysis in far too much contemporary film criticism (that domain of discourse that is loosely called "theory"). For Brownstein, a journalist centered in Los Angeles, writes about a real world in which politics has a direct and demonstrable impact on people's lives. He is concerned with the overt political stances that people take and actively work for, and he is doubtless unaware (and blissfully so!) of such theoretical vagaries that somehow a film's "radical" form translates into a radical political statement. *The Power and the Glitter* is thus a much needed return to a world of real people fighting for real causes.

In fact, *The Power and the Glitter* is a survey less of the relationship between Hollywood and Washington, and more of how Hollywood people have worked for Washington causes, and with how show people dealt with politics more than with how politicians dealt with show people. The glamor of Hollywood was obviously more than Brownstein could resist. Nevertheless, this is a fair and fascinating run-through of Hollywood's changing fortunes as a political force. And Washington's interest in show business is not entirely overlooked. It may be common knowledge (though I doubt it) among historians and political scientists, but how many film scholars were aware of the fact that Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote a full-fledged screen treatment of the life of John Paul Jones? It found its way into the hands of a seemingly receptive Adolph Zukor, but FDR was disappointed when, eventually, he realized it would never be produced. Similarly, John F. Kennedy's relationships to show people is also rehearsed, but again, the author is more fascinated by Frank Sinatra's attraction to Kennedy than Kennedy's to Sinatra.

Brownstein has no particular political agenda of his own, and therefore his survey is concerned with both the left and the right of Hollywood—in fact, he begins his run-through of Hollywood participation in politics with the staunch Republicanism of Louis B. Mayer. Yet since Hollywood figures have, overall, been more attracted to liberal causes and the Democratic party, the survey is necessarily weighted in that direction. And Brownstein himself seems predisposed to the liberal agenda. Sometimes this is to the book's detriment. A succinct analysis of the Popular Front period of Hollywood's anti-fascist activities in the 1930s finds Brownstein saddened by the Communist influence on the various organizations which sprang up in support of Hollywood's efforts to protest Nazism. He is sympathetic to the Hollywood Communists, recognizing that some of their more tortuous logic in defending the Moscow show trials and the Hitler-Stalin non-aggression pact, for instance, was a pathetic attempt to hold on to otherwise idealistic beliefs, but still can say this about the beginnings of HUAC's bullying of Hollywood: "There is no doubt that the Hollywood liberals heightened their vulnerability to those attacks [by HUAC] by failing to assert their independence from the Communist party's interests . . . In the first years of the Cold War [Hollywood progressives leaned] toward extremist positions on the fringe of national politics." (117) To castigate the liberals for their vulnerability in light of a national madness is to ask the liberals to concede some essential justness to McCarthyism. Even in the world of *real-politik* a moral stand must be taken.

Brownstein's implicit liberalism does not blind

him to Hollywood's hypocrisies. In discussing the impressive Hollywood contingent which supported Martin Luther King in the early and middle 1960s, Brownstein notes that there was little change in the color barriers to the executive washrooms of the major studios. "Hollywood is thought of as a liberal place, and in its political expression it tends to be. But its contradictory response to the civil rights movement revealed how mistaken it is to assume that its political liberalism systematically informs the way it does business, or the kinds of films it makes. As an institution, Hollywood resists any agenda—political or social—other than turning a profit." (173)

The bulk of the book is concerned with the contemporary era, starting with Hollywood's support of John Kennedy and continuing through the ensuing social and political issues and candidates into the late 1980s. Brownstein's recollection of the extraordinary political careers of both Lew Wasserman (of MCA) and Arthur Krim (of UA and then Orion) does much to return the studio executive to a place of importance in film world—displaced in academia in favor of the director. And his sensitive, if occasionally frustrated, view of Jane Fonda reminds us of her bravery during the Vietnam era, lest we criticize her too much now for backing down from her stance of that tormented time. Similarly, the detailed discussions of the relationship between Warren Beatty and Gary Hart demonstrate that the price of admission to Hollywood for a politician still comes very high.

Brownstein ultimately may have little interest in films and no ideological agenda to put forth, but I cannot help concluding that he has more to say about Hollywood's politics than can be found in the arcane world of academic film scholarship. While we continue to fawn over *The Searchers* for the contradictions embodied in Ethan Edwards, we might recall a vicious bit of red-baiting on John Wayne's part when he publicly wondered how John F. Kennedy would feel about his pal Sinatra hiring Hollywood Ten member Albert Maltz to work on a film in 1960—fearing the political fallout for JFK, Sinatra fired Maltz. And what should we make of the canonization of *The Terminator* in self-proclaimed journals of radical feminist film scholarship, given Arnold Schwarzenegger's staunch support of the Reagan and Bush administrations which have, among other things, impoverished more women than any social force in our history? This is not to judge a film by the politics of its stars, nor to keep a sort of blacklist for the left. But it is to wonder why someone essentially outside the world of film scholarship recalls the stars' and the studios' politics, while film scholars continue to marginalize ourselves with our writings about the alleged politics of films.

DAVID DESSER

▪ David Desser is our Book Review Editor; he teaches at the University of Illinois, Urbana.

Cinema and History

By Marc Ferro. Trans. by Naomi Greene. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988.

"Historians seek to make us understand and artists seek to make us participate." At a few points in *Cinema and History* Marc Ferro draws distinctions like these between history and the cinema. But the major thrust of the essays reprinted in this volume, making most of them available in English for the first time, concerns the ways in which studies of cinema and of history overlap.

Historians as a group have never paid appropriate attention to film. The persistent reasons (Ferro calls them alibis) for historians ignoring film sources relate partly to the reputation of early film as entertainment for the masses of illiterates. During the first decades of motion picture production, Ferro reminds us, the authorship of films was particularly unclear. Unlike the documents with which historians were familiar, films were "signed" only by the name of the firm that produced them. Films seemed inappropriate as sources for a profession committed to "references and proofs." It was a time when no one would have suggested that historians chose and assembled their documents and constructed their arguments as a montage, or that they sought for "an effect" in the same way a filmmaker might. Writing in 1970, Ferro observed that much of the anti-intellectual bias against film had passed; historians went to the cinema, but "like everyone else—merely as a spectator" rather than as a professional seeking historical understanding.

For several decades now a small body of traditionally trained historians has been trying to break down this resistance of the historical profession to

him to Hollywood's hypocrisies. In discussing the impressive Hollywood contingent which supported Martin Luther King in the early and middle 1960s, Brownstein notes that there was little change in the color barriers to the executive washrooms of the major studios. "Hollywood is thought of as a liberal place, and in its political expression it tends to be. But its contradictory response to the civil rights movement revealed how mistaken it is to assume that its political liberalism systematically informs the way it does business, or the kinds of films it makes. As an institution, Hollywood resists any agenda—political or social—other than turning a profit." (173)

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For several decades now a small body of traditionally trained historians has been trying to break down this resistance of the historical profession to

the critical study of moving images. Ferro has been in the vanguard of this movement, and in very interesting ways. Besides his thoughtful notes and essays published over twenty years and collected here, Ferro has made at least as important a contribution by integrating the thoughtful analysis of film sources into his more traditional historical work—most notably in his *October 1917: A Social History of the Russian Revolution*. The combined effect of the essays brought together in *Cinema and History* is a plea for other historians to see the merit of that integration.

The argument involves an effort to convince historians to look at films in other than the most obvious ways because "each film has a value as a document, whatever its seeming nature." Every film, Ferro stresses, even if it seems not to address the past at all, can help the historian to understand "people's imaginary universe." Like any other cultural artifact, "every film posits a relation between its author, its subject matter and its viewer," and understanding that relation can give insight into the past. The challenge is to convince traditional historians to take the trouble to look for the latent as well as the surface content.

Ferro demonstrates the potential for such analysis in short essays, for example, on the first Soviet and anti-Soviet propaganda films and on the newsreels which document the street demonstrations of the Russian Revolution. What he finds beneath the surface of all of these films is a special concern for the place of the petty bourgeoisie in the evolving revolutionary situation of 1917. Both pro- and anti-Bolshevik films stressed images of the bourgeoisie in seeking to dramatize the social pressures of the time, for example by showing a bourgeois family evicted from or forced to share its comfortable apartment. Through a thoughtful comparison of the two films Ferro finds confirmation for his broader historical conclusions (based on a much wider study of more traditional sources).

The potential allegiance of the bourgeoisie was of central importance to the Reds as well as the Whites in 1917, Ferro argues. "The Bolshevik party needed the bourgeoisie if it was to regenerate the economy." Thus they sought to "seduce" the middle class at the same time that the Whites tried to frighten them. Through close reading of people's dress, the placards they carried, and the ways they related to one another physically in the street, the historian can gain special insight from the analysis of the newsreel record of 1917 demonstrations. The newsreel images show a gradual transition in the relations between the petty bourgeoisie and the demonstrators (from unity through indifference to hostility) not so evident in print records.

In a longer piece on *Chapayev* (1934), Ferro shows how the sequence-by-sequence analysis of a feature film combined with the charting of story lines and characterizations can help reveal latent messages. In this case the messages are about the development of Stalinist ideology in the context of the army. The film removes anarchism from ideas about the revolution and erases Trotsky as an historical figure. "*Chapayev* shows that heroes make mistakes, that spontaneity leads to errors and that individuals die. On the other hand, the party sees correctly, never makes mistakes and never dies." Ferro's analysis includes a subtle reading based on intimate historical knowledge. For example, he notes that the audience would likely have read a reference to Lenin into the scene where the playing of the "Moonlight Sonata" provided the background for the death of a sympathetic character. "They would have all known that it was Lenin's favorite piece and that he said that it was terrible to think that, while you were listening to the greatest works of beauty, dreadful dramas were taking place elsewhere."

Other chapters range over European and American examples and deal with film "as agent of history" and as indicative of "historical consciousness." The final piece in the collection asks: "Does a Filmic Writing of History Exist?" Ferro answers the question as we would expect, but in the process posits a "global classification" for films about history. Do they support or undermine existing institutions? Do they tell the story from above, below, within or without society? In ways the piece is characteristic of the best of Ferro's writing—the bold stroke and the broad generalization which challenge us to think new thoughts. In other ways it disappoints in the sketchy way it supports such sweeping conclusions—the piece in question is only eight pages long.

While the jacket of *Cinema and History* proclaims it to be "a comprehensive survey," which it is not, the ideas in this book are provocative and deserving of the attention of both historians and serious students of film. JOHN E. O'CONNOR

▪ John E. O'Connor is the editor of the journal *Film & History* and teaches at the New Jersey Institute of Technology.

Post New Wave Cinema in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe

Edited by Daniel J. Goulding. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989

This important work fills a gap in English-language scholarship on the modern cinema, i.e., recent developments in the film industries of the USSR and the countries of Eastern Europe, a gap particularly intriguing in light of the recent astonishing developments there. Although they have shared similar political and economic systems and a common official ideology—courtesy of the Soviet Union—each of the countries of "Eastern Europe" has developed along individual lines. There have been parallel periods of relative liberalization and conservative crack-down, of course, but these periods have varied from country to country and have depended as much on local circumstances and conditions as on the prevailing winds from Moscow. The flowering of Bulgarian cinema coincided with the bleakest period in Czechoslovakia, for example. The essays Goulding has assembled deal with films of the last decade, beginning in the late 1970s, a decade marked, for the most part, by a noticeable creative surge and vitality in the film industries of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (although not in Czechoslovakia or Bulgaria).

Perhaps the most dramatic developments have come in the Soviet Union. As Anna Lawton points out, Soviet film-makers have been in the vanguard of *glasnost'*. Indeed, one of the first signals that things were really changing was the appointment of Elem Klimov, an unconventional director, as head of the Cinematographers' Union and the subsequent release of films that had been shelved for years. Lawton inexplicably begins her survey in 1976, however, at the very nadir of the stagnation of the Brezhnev era. She includes a considerable amount of information on attendance figures for certain films (such as those of Paradzhanov and Tarkovsky) and data from public opinion polls. While marginally interesting, this information is not of utmost importance to a discussion of the development of important trends in recent Soviet cinema. It is one of the paradoxes of the Soviet system that films which have no chance of being popular successes—or sometimes even of being released at the time they are made (*Repentance* is a case in point)—are nevertheless financed by the state. Lawton overlooks this very interesting aspect of the Soviet film industry.

Lawton's survey is very thorough, however, and includes virtually all of the important films of the 1970s and 1980s. Perhaps too much attention is devoted to summarizing the plots of relatively insignificant films, while important aspects of other films are ignored. Although comprehensive coverage would not have been possible, some discussion of the developments (other than simple mention of individual films) in the non-Russian Soviet republics would have been welcome. Since true products of the Gorbachev era of *glasnost'* are only now being released, films like *Little Vera* and *Assa*, which have created a sensation at home and abroad, are too recent to have been included in the book.

As Frank Turaj in his essay on Polish film and David Paul in his on Hungarian film point out, both cinemas were enjoying periods of relative "openness" a decade before *glasnost'*. Turaj offers a very thorough, concise survey of the important directors, films and trends in Polish cinema in the 1980s and provides useful background information on the important political developments of the time.

David Paul's essay masterfully attempts to define that elusive quality which, for lack of a better term, must be called "national character," and the Hungarian preoccupation with self-definition. His historical survey is extremely helpful to the reader unfamiliar with Hungarian history and treats in detail the work of "the Giants" of Hungarian cinema: Miklós Jancsó, István Szabó, Károly Makk and Márta Mészáros, directors whose work is well known in the West; he also includes a section on directors whose work is not well known outside of Hungary, plus information on films which, even within Hungary's lenient censorship guidelines, were not released or widely distributed, and discusses the future problems and directions of the Hungarian film industry.

Two excellent essays on East German and Bulgarian cinema by Sigrun Leonhard and Ronald Holloway shed light on schools of cinema virtually unknown to American critics and audiences (although recent Bulgarian films have attracted considerable attention in Europe). The film industries in both countries have developed within fairly rigid, orthodox Marxist systems, but have nevertheless experienced periods of "thaw" and relatively uninhibited creativity. Each also has its particular strengths, linked to national cultural traditions.

Bulgaria, as Holloway points out, has produced first-rate animated and children's films, while East German film has explored the particular problems of women and young people in contemporary society.

Perhaps the most tragic situation is that of Czechoslovakia, whose cultural life has never returned to the level of the "Prague Spring" of 1968. Peter Hames, in his essay, describes the post-invasion period of "normalization": many of the most talented film-makers fled abroad; most who remained were unable to work for seven or more years. Although the situation has improved somewhat—Milos Forman returned to Prague to film *Amadeus* and Věra Chytilová, František Vláčil, Štefan Uher, and others are currently working in the film industry—none of the recent films produced have equaled the classics of the 1960s. Other directors, like Jiří Menzel and Juraj Jakubisko, returned to film-making only after humiliating recantations and denunciations of their previous work. Only Czech animated films attained in the 1970s and 1980s a level equal to that of the 1960s.

Yugoslavia, which has pursued its own individual path, provides yet another example of the rich diversity possible within a state-owned film industry. As Daniel Goulding mentions in his essay, the Yugoslav film industy, although the least centrally controlled of the Eastern European industries, has had other problems precisely because of greater individual autonomy and increased self-management. Grave economic problems have also plagued Yugoslavia—problems familiar to film-makers in capitalist countries who must continually balance artistic integrity against commercial success. Yugoslav cinema enjoyed somewhat of a renaissance in the late 1970s and 1980s, and film proved to be one of Yugoslavia's most successful exports. Film-makers have managed to transcend regional tensions and rivalries to create some of the most interesting films in Europe today.

Since the book is confined to recent developments in Soviet and Eastern European cinema, earlier developments and the cinematic histories of these countries are mentioned only in passing. Only the essays on East Germany, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia contain some sort of historical overview, and quite a bit of knowledge on the part of the reader is presumed in other essays. Since so many contemporary films in the USSR and Eastern Europe deal with recent history and politics, some sort of historical framework in each of the essays might have been helpful in order to better understand the conflicts expressed in many of the films described. The volume suffers from a considerable number of small title errors (Paradzhanov's film is *The Color of the Pomegranate*, Zanussi's is *Barwy ochronne* and Ryazanov's is *Sluzhebnyi roman*) and spelling inconsistencies; the typesetter was obviously not familiar with Polish diacritical marks. Otherwise, *Post New Wave Cinema in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* is an impressive, very comprehensive, and most welcome addition to scholarship on this "most important" art form.

BARBARA NIEMCZYK

▪ Barbara Niemczyk teaches East European film at the University of Washington.

Ben Hecht
The Man Behind the Legend

By William MacAdams. New York: Scribner's 1990. $24.95

Writers in Hollywood: 1915-1951

By Ian Hamilton. New York: Harper & Row. 1990. $25.00

Ben Hecht was one of those American literary half-geniuses who spent part of his amazing life, as a scriptwriter of noteworthy films, writing his way into Hollywood history, and another, longer part, when he was mostly doctoring mediocre movies, trying to write his way out. Partly because he was so colorful and swaggering and extra-paradoxical, Hecht has probably had more critical bouquets tossed in his direction than all of the other screen scribes of his era combined; just for example, publicity material for the MacAdams book catalogs the effusive praise of Jean-Luc Godard, David O. Selznick, and Pauline Kael, three unalikes who could agree on one thing at least—Hecht was tops.

Hyperbole lends itself to Hecht, who was the stuff of extremes—extreme ambition and early success, extreme iconoclasm and self-publicity, extreme downhill slide. In attempting to sort out the

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Ben Hecht was one of those American literary half-geniuses who spent part of his amazing life, as a scriptwriter of noteworthy films, writing his way into Hollywood history, and another, longer part, when he was mostly doctoring mediocre movies, trying to write his way out. Partly because he was so colorful and swaggering and extra-paradoxical, Hecht has probably had more critical bouquets tossed in his direction than all of the other screen scribes of his era combined; just for example, publicity material for the MacAdams book catalogs the effusive praise of Jean-Luc Godard, David O. Selznick, and Pauline Kael, three unalikes who could agree on one thing at least—Hecht was tops.

Hyperbole lends itself to Hecht, who was the stuff of extremes—extreme ambition and early success, extreme iconoclasm and self-publicity, extreme downhill slide. In attempting to sort out the

splendid anarchy of his life, MacAdams has done some careful research and lots of interviews. His spadework is admirable, especially the material relating to Hecht's pre-Hollywood, newspaper/literature renaissance years in Chicago. What years!

Yet his treatment of the Hollywood times is catch as catch can, as MacAdams scrambles to sort out the claims and counterclaims, the Hecht from the Hechtian, as it were. The author gets overexcited about Hecht's vast quantity of "uncredited" work, as claimed by directors and Hecht himself. (The claims, always, a little vague.) One can appreciate MacAdams's seeking out and interviewing vaunted directors, Ford and Hawks and Tashlin (especially Tashlin, whose reminiscence is priceless) for their points of view. But he loses sight here of the themes developed in the chapters on the early years, and of pertinent questions about Hecht's script contributions—the relative quality of work sometimes done hurriedly and cynically. The scripts themselves are virtually ignored, barely quoted, whereas earlier in the book MacAdams cites key passages, or gives a better idea of, the columns, novels, poetry, and plays.

Worse, MacAdams loses sight of Hecht the man. There is too much totting up of credits (an extensive bibliography and filmography), not enough feeling for the flesh. No visceral sense of Hecht's attractive qualities—his sense of humor, his dazzle as a "a verbal Coney Island." Hecht's Zionism and singleminded crusade on behalf of the state of Israel are given space, but never quite integrated and made credible. His marriage to his strange, enigmatic wife Rose, his highly productive and (I gather) highly charged collaboration with Charles MacArthur—these don't come off on the page.

MacAdams strains to give Hecht his due, but I wonder. His novels sound interestingly pretentious. His plays (especially *Twentieth Century*) deserve a Broadway footnote. His best films were repair work or together with someone else. The Hecht-MacArthur Astoria films were infinitely more important for what they represented (writerly freedom) than for what they were (mostly not very good). Ironically, Hecht's best book may be his exaggerated, completely entertaining autobiography, *A Child of the Century*—with its surprisingly scant mentions of Hollywood.

By comparison, Ian Hamilton's *Writers in Hollywood: 1915–1951* is a real goof-off. His liberally excerpted script material provides some highlights in an otherwise entirely dispensable book that is a synoptic rehash of all the other best-known or most obvious books about screenwriters (check out the long list at the back; they're all there, my own *Backstory*—I humbly mention—included). Like Otto Friedrich, whose *City of Nets* collated so many other books to explore his theme of Hollywood in the 1940s, Hamilton is defiantly upfront about being derivative.

The most interesting, probably the most original, section of the book fills in the history of scripts and scriptwriters in the silent era. But once into talkies, Hamilton tills familiar soil, and tills it familiarly. On such questions as Orson Welles vs. Herman Mankiewicz, who wrote *Casablanca*, the Hollywood bind of F. Scott Fitzgerald and other burnt-out literary cases, and the blacklist, who wouldn't be derivative? Hamilton adds little to subjects done better and at greater length and subtlety elsewhere.

His tone is witty and assured, the book tidy and cleverly written. His section on Dudley Nichols is devastating and almost convincing, damning of Nichols and approving of that rascally tyrant John Ford. Does Nichols deserve it?

Sometimes the story behind a book—the why and the how of it—might make the better book. MacAdams says he became "obsessed" by Hecht in his teens, and began his book almost twenty years ago by interviewing Ford and others before their deaths. That labor of love produced a useful, diligent book—one that Hamilton may plumb in the future if he considers a further installment on screenwriters like Hecht floundering post-1951.

But Hamilton—whose biography of J. D. Salinger spurred the court decision that sharply limits biographers—why did he choose this well-trampled ground? Does he like screenwriters very much? It is not evident. Does he even like the movies he is writing about? It is not evident.

PATRICK MCGILLIGAN

▪ Patrick McGilligan is the author of *Backstory* and *Backstory 2*, volumes of screenwriter interviews published by the University of California Press.

The Modern Cinema of Poland

By Bolesław Michałek and Frank Turaj. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988. $35 cloth, $12.50 paper.

In this pathbreaking book Michałek and Turaj have identified and woven together the multiple strands of historical, sociocultural, political, and aesthetic influences that have shaped the evolution of Polish cinema from the end of World War II to the early 1980s; and they have done so in a clear, forceful, lean, and interesting style. Not only have the authors provided a systematic and scholarly discussion of the founding and evolution of Poland's postwar socialist cinema, but they have also provided a perceptive analysis of the films of four of its most influential film artists.

The broad outline of Poland's postwar film development does not differ radically from those of neighboring Central and East European socialist states. There is first the period of reconstruction immediately after the war in which the infrastructure of a newly founded socialist cinema rises phoenix-like from the ashes and devastation of war and a distinctive national film culture begins to take shape. These early creative sparks, however, are damped by Stalinist-inspired centralized bureaucratic structures, and stifled by the sterile and deforming aesthetic dogma of socialist realism. After the Stalinist period (late forties and early fifties), there follow alternating periods of freer film creativity and periods of crisis, repression, bureaucratic interventions, and what regime authorities euphemistically label "stabilization."

In Poland, as Michałek eloquently demonstrates, the richest periods of film expression occurred from the mid-fifties throughout much of the sixties, and again in the mid-seventies to early eighties. The first impressive "new wave" of postwar Polish cinema in the fifties and sixties was nourished by the establishment of a system of decentralized film production "units" headed by leading film artists—including the internationally famous unit "X" headed by Wajda and Michałek himself; by the steady maturation of the highly respected Polish film school at Łodz, and by an artistically sophisticated and unusually gifted community of film directors, scenarists, cinematographers, actors, actresses, and other film artists. Film expression was also closely wed to the deepest and best currents of Polish literature and arts, to the distinctive shaping influence of Polish history and national aspirations, and to a shared view of cinema as possessing high moral and social purpose. All of these factors are given life and meaning in Michałek and Turaj's analysis—Michałek writing from the inside as one who played a leading role in the story he is unfolding, including his artistic collaboration with Wajda and other leading Polish film directors, and Turaj writing from the outside, but with a knowledge formed from his many years as a careful critic and scholar of Polish cinema.

Separate chapters are devoted to the discussion of the films of Jerzy Kawalerowicz, Andrzej Munk, Andrzej Wajda, and Krzysztof Zanussi. While enormously influential in the development of Polish cinema, Kawalerowicz and Munk are much less well known in the West than Wajda and Zanussi. The careful attention paid to them by Michałek and Turaj should pave the way for renewed critical appreciation of their films. Especially valuable is their lengthy chapter on Poland's most renowned film director, Andrzej Wajda, whose major films have earned an important place in world cinema—especially his visually sophisticated and emotionally powerful film trilogy of the war years, *A Generation* (1955), *Canal* (1957), *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958), and his more recent international critical and popular successes, *Man of Marble* (1977) and its sequel *Man of Iron* (1980), the latter of which won the *Palme d'or* for best feature film at Cannes in 1981. This chapter provides a welcome update of Michałek's earlier book on Wajda (Tantivy Press, 1973) which is now out of print. Also impressive and insightful, though relatively less successful than the chapter on Wajda, is the general analysis provided of the films of Zanussi. The cinematic and philosophical complexity of Zanussi's films require a closer-grained analysis than the format of this book permits.

After a comparatively sterile period in the late sixties and early seventies, Polish cinema once again burst onto the world stage in the late seventies and early eighties with an impressive outpouring of artistically and socially meaningful films. Once again as in the fifties, Wajda led the way with the already mentioned *Man of Marble,* the first film to penetrate official mythology surrounding the Stalinist years in Poland and to expose its propagandistic excesses and political grotesqueries. *Man of Iron* staked out even bolder territory by mirroring the formation of the Solidarity movement—a film

which both reflected and helped to shape its dramatic course. The new mood of Polish cinema (labelled the "cinema of moral concern") was richly confirmed and enhanced by Krzysztof Zanussi's complex cinematic and philosophical meditations *Camouflage* (1976), *Spiral* (1978), and *The Constant Factor* (1980). These already well established directors were soon joined by a younger generation of filmmakers (Agnieszka Holland, Piotr Andrejew, Zbigniew Kamiński, Witold Orzechowski, Ryszard Bugajski, Feliks Falk, Krzysztof Kieślowski, Tomasz Zygadło, and others) who rapidly achieved international recognition. Following the crackdown on Solidarity, however, several of these rising talents emigrated to the West, and Polish film production went into a brief period of shock and suspended animation.

Regrettably, Michałek and Turaj's book carries the story only to 1984 with a very brief epilogue appended to recount the recent resurgence of important new Polish films which have been released in the past few years (including, for example, Wajda's excellent film, based on a book by Konwicki, *Chronicles of Love* (1986), Zanussi's triumphant *The Year of the Quiet Sun* (1984), Felik Falk's *Idol* (1985) and *Hero of the Year* (1986) as well as other recent important films by Kieślowski and Zygadło). Having added an epilogue, it would have been helpful if the authors had better used the opportunity to expand more fully on these important post-crackdown developments.

Michałek and Turaj wisely refrain from predicting the course that Polish cinema is likely to chart in the next few years. What is certain, however, is that their book provides the first comprehensive guide for illuminating the path already taken by Polish cinema in the postwar years, and it is likely to remain a standard reference work for many years to come. DANIEL GOULDING

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British Film Institute. *Film and Television Handbook, 1990.* London: BFI, 1989. Thoughtful commentary, of the kind familiar in *Sight & Sound*, about the ever parlous state of the British "image industry" (in the new phrase). With current information about film bookshops, schools, archives, press and production firms, festivals, film publications, etc. (much of this is of international interest). E. C.

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Miller's *B Movies* (1973) done as an illustrated checklist and (blessedly) featuring a table of contents. Amiable asides and plentiful nuggets of half-forgotten, second-string-cinema lore spice a terse, straightforward text. ("How can I explain my infatuation for Blanche Mehaffey, a pretty heroine of dozens of Bs who rarely rose above adequacy in her performances?")

DON WILLIS

Drew, Bernard A. *Motion Picture Series and Sequels: A Reference Guide*. NY: Garland, 1990. $50. Series movies are as popular as ever, and older series entries (Crime Doctor, Boston Blackie, Jungle Jim titles, etc.) are turning up more and more on cable TV. Drew's book lists oodles of series, but seems rather hastily put together. Sample glitch: The first Crazy Fat Ethel film was *Criminally Insane*, not *Death Nurse*, though the latter features stock from the former. Bonus glitch: *Dr. Terror's House of Horrors* and *Dr. Terror's Galley of Horrors* are unrelated.

DON WILLIS

Gray, John, compiler. *Blacks in Film and Television: A Pan-African Bibliography of Films, Filmmakers, and Performers*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1990. $55. Lists more than 6,000 articles, books, etc. about African film and black film-making in other countries. Covers American publications only; unannotated.

Hadley-Garcia, George. *Hispanic Hollywood*. New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1991. $15.95. The announced topic is interesting (Hispanic performers and stories in the American cinema) but this is a hodgepodge book. Most of the text is disconnected anecdotes not only about the many excellent Hispanic participants in the industry, but also about a lot of the non-Hispanics who worked with them; the illustrations are a similar mess, for the most part utterly disconnected with the text they accompany and often seeming totally irrelevant to the book's theme. The organization is generally chronological by decade, but some attention is paid to cultural issues and also to organizing efforts to improve treatment of Hispanics within the industry. The amount of sheer information in the volume is impressive, and it will be essential to consult for anybody wishing to analyze the increasingly important cultural symbiosis between the US and Latin America, particularly Mexico.

E. C.

Halliwell, Leslie. *Halliwell's Film Guide*, 7th ed. New York: HarperCollins, 1990. $19.95 paper.

Halliwell, Leslie. *Halliwell's Filmgoer's and Video Viewer's Companion*, 9th ed. NY: Harper and Row, 1990. $19.95 paper. This monster volume (1,229 pages) now incorporates "The Filmgoer's Book of Quotes" and "Halliwell's Movie Quiz."

HBO's Guide to Movies on Video-Cassette and Cable TV, 1991. NY: Harper Perennial, 1991. $14.95 paper. In the ratings of this volume, the people speak, and *Cinderella* and *The Other Side of Midnight* outrank *Citizen Kane*. Gives director and main cast credits, brief synopsis, and very brief critical asides. At a mere 7,000 titles, not as comprehensive as Hallowell or Maltin, but useful to warn parents about nudity, strong language, or violence, and to trueblue film lovers about colorization.

E. C.

Molt, Cynthia Marylee. Gone with the Wind *on Film: A Complete Reference*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1990. $45.00. A dauntingly detailed catalogue of *GWTW* costumes, stills, sets, bibliographic citations, etc.—every damn tree in the forest. A monument to personal as well as national obsession. But not one mention of Otis Ferguson, critic at the time of first release for *The New Republic* who, on principle, or out of perversity, initially refused to see and review the much-ballyhooed film, whose dramatic extravagance now seems a shade campy. He eventually relented and noted that Olivia de Havilland "either is a baby or has one or something. . . ."

DON WILLIS

Oliviero, Jeffrey. *Motion Picture Players' Credits: Worldwide Performers of 1967 through 1980 with Filmographies of Their Entire Careers, 1905-1983*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1991. $145. The 1967-1980 period was chosen to document a "renaissance" period in film, but no explanation is given for the 1983 cutoff date for filmographies. Oliviero's thousand-page book passes some tough tests *re* obscure titles, and fails others. Missing from John Agar's filmography: *Night Fright* (date uncertain); from James Best's: *The Brain Machine* (1972); from Fabian's: *La Dinastia Dracula* (1978), in which Fabian plays Dracula, and *Kiss Daddy Goodbye* (1982); and from Van Johnson's and John Saxon's: *Crime au cimetière Etrusque* (1982). *Seis Pasajes al Infierno* (1975), however, is (correctly) listed for both John Russell and Mala Powers; *La Casa de las Sombras* (1976) for Yvonne De Carlo (though not for John Gavin or Susan Oliver); and *Sussuri nel Buio* (1976)) for Joseph Cotten, though its alternate title, *A Whisper in the Dark*, turns up as a separate film. DON WILLIS

Phantom of the Movies. *The Phantom's Ultimate Video Guide*. New York: Dell, 1989. $12.95

Rainey, Buck. *Those Fabulous Serial Heroines*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1990. $59.50. Credits for the films of 46 serial heroines, with a photo of each.

Segrave, Kerry, and Linda Martin. *The Continental Actress: European Film Stars of the Postwar Era: Biographies, Criticism, Filmographies, Bibliographies*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1990. $35. Brief, browsable biographies of 41 actresses. The "unidentified actor" with Ursula Andress in a pose from *Red Sun* (page 83) is really not that hard to identify—it's Alain Delon.

Also, *Malenka* (page 290) is the same film as *Fangs of the Living Dead* (same page), the US release title of that Anita Ekberg film. DON WILLIS

Terrace, Vincent. *Fifty Years of Television: A Guide to Series and Pilots, 1937–1988*. Cranbury, NJ: Cornwall Books, 1991. $29.95. Credits for 4850 programs.

Scripts

Jacob's Ladder

By Bruce Joel Rubin. [Applause Screenplay Series] New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1990. $10.95 paper

Jacob's Ladder did mild box-office business and received mixed, and often confused, critical reviews. Directed by Adrian Lyne, the film stars Tim Robbins as Jacob Singer, a soldier in battle in Vietnam in 1972 who suddenly undergoes a disorienting awakening on a subway in New York some four years later, only to find his life and world unaccountably hallucinogenic and terrifyingly altered. Bruce Joel Rubin's screenplay of *Jacob's Ladder* had long sustained a cult reputation in Hollywood as a worthy unfilmed script; as far back as 1983 it was touted by Stephen Rebello in *American Film* as one of "the ten best unproduced screenplays" in Hollywood.

The perpetual dissociated state experienced by Jacob Singer, awakening from one fragile dream only to find himself in another and then another and so on—until both he and the audience lose grasp of what is real and what is not—is not unlike 1990's earlier but much less compelling release, *Total Recall*, putatively "inspired by" a Philip K. Dick short story. Indeed, the dissociated, amnesiac experiences of Jacob Singer seem a much more interesting and sophisticated version of Philip K. Dick than *Total Recall*. Science fiction and fantasy film scholars and critics should therefore find of interest Rubin's annotated screenplay for *Jacob's Ladder*, an installment of "The Applause Screenplay Series" under the general editorship of Mark Mixson. The book not only includes the shooting script of the film, but also an annotated appendix of deleted scenes, over 100 black and white stills, complete credits, plus a 50-page essay by the screenwriter titled "Jacob's Chronicle," a fascinating account of the screenplay's odyssey to the screen. Rubin's account of his screenplay's history, his setbacks and frustrations, his collaboration with Adrian Lyne, the continual revisions and conceptual compromises made during the development of the shooting script, should interest not only sf/fantasy/horror film scholars, but all those interested in the motion picture industry.

I suspect that the film *Jacob's Ladder* is eventually going to be recognized as one of those motion pictures that, in developing its highly individualized imagery, opened up new cinematic territory, like Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, William Friedkin's *Exorcist*, or Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. The publication of the annotated screenplay provides an invaluable means to chart its significance. SAM UMLAND

▪ Sam Umland teaches at the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

Alea, Tomas Gutierrez [director]: *Memories of Underdevelopment*. Edmundo Desnoes [novelist]: *Inconsolable Memories*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990. $37.00 cloth; $14.00 paper. Script and source novel, together with introductory and background materials by Michael Chanan.

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Scripts

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Jacob's Ladder did mild box-office business and received mixed, and often confused, critical reviews. Directed by Adrian Lyne, the film stars Tim Robbins as Jacob Singer, a soldier in battle in Vietnam in 1972 who suddenly undergoes a disorienting awakening on a subway in New York some four years later, only to find his life and world unaccountably hallucinogenic and terrifyingly altered. Bruce Joel Rubin's screenplay of *Jacob's Ladder* had long sustained a cult reputation in Hollywood as a worthy unfilmed script; as far back as 1983 it was touted by Stephen Rebello in *American Film* as one of "the ten best unproduced screenplays" in Hollywood.

The perpetual dissociated state experienced by Jacob Singer, awakening from one fragile dream only to find himself in another and then another and so on—until both he and the audience lose grasp of what is real and what is not—is not unlike 1990's earlier but much less compelling release, *Total Recall*, putatively "inspired by" a Philip K. Dick short story. Indeed, the dissociated, amnesiac experiences of Jacob Singer seem a much more interesting and sophisticated version of Philip K. Dick than *Total Recall*. Science fiction and fantasy film scholars and critics should therefore find of interest Rubin's annotated screenplay for *Jacob's Ladder*, an installment of "The Applause Screenplay Series" under the general editorship of Mark Mixson. The book not only includes the shooting script of the film, but also an annotated appendix of deleted scenes, over 100 black and white stills, complete credits, plus a 50-page essay by the screenwriter titled "Jacob's Chronicle," a fascinating account of the screenplay's odyssey to the screen. Rubin's account of his screenplay's history, his setbacks and frustrations, his collaboration with Adrian Lyne, the continual revisions and conceptual compromises made during the development of the shooting script, should interest not only sf/fantasy/horror film scholars, but all those interested in the motion picture industry.

I suspect that the film *Jacob's Ladder* is eventually going to be recognized as one of those motion pictures that, in developing its highly individualized imagery, opened up new cinematic territory, like Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, William Friedkin's *Exorcist*, or Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. The publication of the annotated screenplay provides an invaluable means to chart its significance. SAM UMLAND

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This is a wonderful, helpful, thoughtful book on making documentary films by Alan Rosenthal, the author of three previous books of interviews with documentary film-makers. While I was reading this book for review, I got a call from a young student who wanted advice on which film school to go to. She began to talk about the romance of being on location and shooting "real life" with the camera. When she took a breath, I suggested that what she was talking about wasn't romantic, it was damn hard work. "Oh, yes, that too," she mumbled, and gushed on. This book is for her and for all the others, including many practicing film-makers, who don't see the hard work and the head work in making films.

Most books about making documentaries include lengthy discussions of the hardware involved, and how to use it effectively; they do not go into much detail about the thinking, planning, and writing that must be done to make an effective film. This book by Rosenthal is precisely about that thinking, planning, and writing. This is the book that documentary film-makers have needed for sixty years.

Rosenthal has made over fifty documentary films for a wide variety of sponsors and funding agencies in three countries. This book is the distillation of the knowledge and wisdom he has gained from his own experience, and from what he has learned from his in-depth interviews of over 60 practicing film-makers. One of the most useful features throughout the book is its illuminating examples: of film proposals; of different kinds of narration; of finished films, showing how pictures and words relate to each other; of well-known films, how they were conceived and what happened during their production. The book also abounds with quotes from conversations with film-makers.

Structured logically, the book starts with the idea of film and ends with release prints. Its five parts are: "From Idea to First Draft," "Preproduction," "Production," "Postproduction," and "Special Cases." "Special Cases" include *cinéma vérité*, docudrama, historical documentaries, and industrial and public relations films.

By far the strongest sections of the book are parts one through three with part five nearly as valuable. The eleven pages on editing are not enough, nor are the five pages on finishing the film; however, there are many good books on film editing and on the final steps of postproduction. There is unfortunately nothing in this book about dealing with the film lab, though laboratory relations can be as important as anything else in making a film, particularly for someone just starting out.

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scenes in *Torn Curtain*. What useful reading this would be for film school students! JOHN FELL

Miller, Pat P. *Script Supervising and Film Continuity*. 2d ed. Stoneham, MA: Focal Press, 1990. $24.95 paper. How to do it.

Phillips, William H. *Writing Short Scripts*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990. $30.00 cloth; $15.95 paper. Phillips has noticed that while almost all of the dozens of scriptwriting advice books now available concentrate on features, nobody has focused on the short-film scripts that students in fact usually start out writing. His advice is nothing more than okay, but the book contains three useful full scripts (one by Susan Seidelman) and a set of screencards for one of them. E. C.

Randall, John. *Feature Films on a Low Budget*. Stoneham, MA: Focal Press, 1991. $18.95 paper.

Whelan, Jeremy; Tom Wiecks, ed. *The ABC's of Acting: (The Art/Business/and Craft)*. West Linn, OR: Blue Heron Books, 1990. $10.95 paper. Tips and exercises for the performer, whether on stage or before the camera.

Theory

Archetypes in Japanese Film

The Sociopolitical and Religious Significance of the Principal Heroes and Heroines

By Gregory Barrett. Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1989.

Gregory Barrett's book carves out a singular place for itself in Japanese film studies. Barrett's study of the conventionalized symbolic imagery of the principal heroes and heroines of Japanese film is an intentional departure from the methods and focus of previous works by Joan Mellen, Audie Bock, Noël Burch, and Donald Richie. Barrett notes that these authors have been primarily concerned with director studies and have tended to emphasize Japanese high culture, e.g., the tea ceremony, the Noh drama, haiku poetry, Zen and such aesthetic concepts as *mono no aware*. By contrast, Barrett is concerned with exploring the roots of the imagery of film heroes and heroines in Japanese popular culture. He accordingly de-emphasizes the work of directors who have been canonized in the Western literature, film-makers such as Kurosawa, Mizoguchi, Naruse, and Ozu. Rather than selecting films for study based on the uniqueness or complexity of their visual style, he uses criteria for selection such as the clarity and comprehensiveness with which the character archetypes are embodied in a given film. Furthermore, instead of high culture, Barrett emphasizes such popular forms as television, comic books, folk tales, and oral narratives performed by storytellers.

While his analyses do not engage the unique formal properties of cinema, he does demonstrate clearly how many of the basic and familiar character types in film are part of a much broader cultural discourse. Working with a sample of more than a thousand Japanese films, Barrett constructed an initial classification of basic character types which he then traced back through traditions of Kabuki theater and oral and written narratives, back into the first lengthy mythology, *Kojiki* (*The Record of Ancient Events*, A.D. 712). After establishing in detail the historical origins of selected character types, Barrett then traces their metamorphoses throughout modern Japanese history as their changing presentations respond to constellations of shifting social forces.

The character types which Barrett isolates intersect with society in varying ways. For example, a group of conservative archetypes offers, according to Barrett, models of personal submission and/or group affiliation. These types include those of the loyal retainer and the tormented lord, familiar from the *Chushingura* epic, as well as chaste warriors and yakuza heroes. Another group of archetypes are more problematic, Barrett suggests, since they offer a dual message of submission and affiliation coupled with a moderate social protest. Character types here include those of the wanderer, the vengeful female spirit familiar from the Noh drama, as well as all-suffering females and passive males, the prodigal son, and the forgiving parent. Finally, the third category of archetypes which Barrett isolates are purely oppositional. These are confined mainly to films of the 1960s, the period of the Japanese New Wave, and include youthful characters possessed of high self-esteem and a socially rebellious nature.

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scenes in *Torn Curtain*. What useful reading this would be for film school students! JOHN FELL

Miller, Pat P. *Script Supervising and Film Continuity*. 2d ed. Stoneham, MA: Focal Press, 1990. $24.95 paper. How to do it.

Phillips, William H. *Writing Short Scripts*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990. $30.00 cloth; $15.95 paper. Phillips has noticed that while almost all of the dozens of scriptwriting advice books now available concentrate on features, nobody has focused on the short-film scripts that students in fact usually start out writing. His advice is nothing more than okay, but the book contains three useful full scripts (one by Susan Seidelman) and a set of screencards for one of them. E. C.

Randall, John. *Feature Films on a Low Budget*. Stoneham, MA: Focal Press, 1991. $18.95 paper.

Whelan, Jeremy; Tom Wiecks, ed. *The ABC's of Acting: (The Art/Business/and Craft)*. West Linn, OR: Blue Heron Books, 1990. $10.95 paper. Tips and exercises for the performer, whether on stage or before the camera.

Theory

Archetypes in Japanese Film

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tions of the essays of film scholar Tadao Sato, and in his new book he is concerned to extend Sato's explorations of the ways that cinema is inflected by social forces and in turn influences the social fabric. Accordingly, in his best discussions, Barrett emphasizes the sociopolitical significance of the archetypes. His discussion of the loyal retainer–tormented lord dyad, for example, traces the way successive presentations of these characters have represented sentiments ranging from individual honor and courage, to loyalty and affiliation with a group, to submission to the state and patriotism. His discussion of the chaste warrior archetype links the sexual repression embodied by this character with popular mobilization during wartime. The chaste warrior's renunciation of all social ties in favor of single-minded service to his lord or pursuit of martial prowess became a functional political symbol for a populace expected to march in lockstep with a modern military machine. The vengeful female spirit archetype could serve as an embodiment of repressive male anxieties about women, while at the same time incorporating a critique of social injustice sensitive to a female viewpoint. Barrett's weakest discussion is on the modern oppositional archetypes of the 1960s and 1970s. He neglects to discuss their relationship with then-contemporary currents of social protest or the revisions of cinematic form collectively carried out by the New Wave. Readers may wish to supplement this brief chapter with David Desser's richly textured portrait of the Japanese New Wave, *Eros plus Massacre*.

Archetypal analysis, in general, is an outmoded critical methodology in contemporary film studies. Barrett, however, is generally careful to emphasize the archetypal tradition not of Jung or Northrop Frye, but of Robert Bellah, who emphasized the manner in which cultural images might emerge from the sociophysical environment, rather than from a transcultural collective unconscious. Although his analyses are oriented mainly toward content rather than form, Barrett's emphasis enables him to avoid many of the pitfalls to which conventional archetypal analyses may be prone, although he is occasionally quite willing to assert the existence in a given film of universally meaningful cultural or religious symbols. Barrett's book is an important addition to the existing materials on Japanese film studies. His wide-ranging discussions situate the cinema within the much broader field of popular culture and begin to map out an ideological and semiotic landscape within which, or against which, Japanese film-makers, greater and lesser alike, must work. STEPHEN PRINCE

▪ Stephen Prince teaches at Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

Psychoanalysis and Cinema

Edited by E. Ann Kaplan. New York: Routledge, 1990.

According to editor E. Ann Kaplan, the aim of this volume is to make available an anthology of writing about cinema and psychoanalysis that would be comparable to one of the anthologies about literature and psychoanalysis. Since psychoanalysis has been at least as important to the last fifteen years of film study as it has been to these same years in literary study, Kaplan would seem more than justified in seeking to fill this lack.

Curiously, however, this lack may only be apparent. For while there is no anthology with a title indicating the exclusive subject of psychoanalysis and cinema, there is no real lack of published or anthologized work in this area. Nor is there a lack of anthologized work in the related area of feminist film theory and criticism, one important strain of which has taken a distinctly psychoanalytic direction.* Indeed, much recent film theory, and certainly much feminist film theory, has been dominated by psychoanalytic paradigms seeking to link the visual language of dreams, the mirror stage, and such key ideas as voyeurism and fetishism to the insubstantial yet perceptual images of films. Yet Kaplan does not include any of these basic texts of psychoanalytic film theory—by Metz, Baudry,

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So while fascinating in places and though it includes some excellent essays, the anthology suffers from an identity crisis: neither an introduction to the field offering a collection of founding essays, nor a lively sample of current issues and directions, it rests uneasily somewhere in between. For example, some of the best essays included—especially those by Claire Johnston, Laura Mulvey, Mary Ann Doane, Kaja Silverman, offer fascinating feminist applications and interrogations of psychoanalytic ideas. With only a few deletions, this volume could have easily been called *Feminist Film Criticism and Psychoanalysis*. Certainly its first two sections—"Feminist Film Theory and Its Revisioning" (including essays by Mulvey, Friedberg and Doane); "Sexual Difference and Jacques Tourneur" (with essays by Johnston, Linderman and Bellour) —along with its section on "Avant Garde Film" (with Linda Peckham's close reading of Leslie Thornton's *Adynata* and Yvonne Rainer's witty discussion of her own *The Man Who Envied Women*) are predominantly feminist.

As an anthology of feminist psychoanalytic theory and criticism, this volume would have made more sense. It also could have eliminated some of its duller essays, especially its meandering epilogue translating a 1983 conversation between Raymond Bellour and psychoanalyst Guy Rosolato.

Still, despite this lack of coherence, there are some fine classic essays—Mulvey's (much anthologized) "Afterthoughts" to her influential "Visual Pleasure"; Claire Johnston's essay on *Anne of the Indies*—as well as two new essays that make a distinct contribution to the field (of feminist psychoanalytic criticism). Kaja Silverman looks at American films of the post-World War II era portraying male heroes who return from war psychically or physically wounded. Investigating how historical traumas tend to break through "protective shields" by generating crises within established systems of representation, she isolates key moments in postwar cinema (for example in *The Best Years of Our Lives*) when female characters look acceptingly at male lack.

Mary Ann Doane also takes up the question of history's relation to subjectivity in her astute exploration of feminist film criticism's appeal to history via the experiences of real women. Such experiences are often held up as counters to the illusory mastery presumably described by psychoanalytic accounts of the cinematic apparatus. But rather than arguing for this real history over and against eternal psychic structures imitated by the apparatus, Doane argues that the psyche is constructed in and as history. Memory of its events are never accessible as such. Like Silverman, her view of history is of a trauma that is a function of representation. Taken together, these two essays suggest new attempts to consider the relations between history and the unconscious—a potentially important new direction in psychoanalytic film theory.

This volume is the first in a new series of American Film Institute Readers. The AFI is resuming in a different format a previously abandoned series of "monographs" that were poorly distributed by another press. Though the AFI has a lot of catching up to do if it is to ever begin to rival the long list of useful anthologies and monographs put out by the British Film Institute, it is important that it is trying to do something in the area of film education—though such volumes should include indexes. Judging by this first volume, there may be a need to think more carefully about the audience for such work. The present volume will most likely be off-putting to undergraduates because it does not attempt to explain the field while advanced students will not find too much that is really new. Future editors beware! LINDA WILLIAMS

▪ Linda Williams, author of *Hard Core*, teaches at the University of California, Irvine.

Film and Meaning

By Ian Douglas. Murdoch, Australia: Continuum Books, 1989.

Put together by friends and family after his death in 1983, Ian Douglas's *Film and Meaning* is an allusive, elusive, ambitious, and often intensely difficult book. No doubt some of the difficulty derives from the book's having been edited from notes and drafts (by reader-response literary theorist Horst Ruthrof). But even more, it

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comes from the very gambit that Douglas engages in: to rethink the pertinence of film for philosophy, of philosophy for film.

Contrary to the way one might traditionally imagine the conjunction of philosophy and film, Douglas does not take film to be a stable object of analysis to which various systems of philosophical endeavor could then be applied. Instead, in a way complementary to other theorists who have begun to examine film's effects on disciplines of study (see, for example, Marie-Claire Ropars, with her notion of modern cinema as a force that reads philosophy, that puts its precepts to the test), Douglas wants to argue that film's philosophic value comes from the fact precisely that it interrogates the stability of philosophical concepts. Film has become so much an integral part of our modernity that philosophy can avoid it only at the risk of becoming antiquarian.

Thus, if Douglas returns to questions that seem to have become old hat in film study—especially, the question of a photographic medium also being an art, a force of imagination—his point is less to rehash the issues for film study than for philosophy per se. For example, the question of an art that is real and imaginary at the same time becomes, for Douglas, a way to intervene in raging philosophical debates about reference and signification: the complexity of film serves as a warning against all attempts in philosophy to run to quick and easy solutions to such debates. Neither just imagination nor just realism, the filmic image invites reflection of the most advanced sort.

Douglas's position is roughly pragmatic, although he takes a distance from those traditions that would take this to mean a concern with the *useful;* his own terminological preference is for *pragmaticist,* coined by the American philosopher Charles S. Peirce. For Douglas, a pragmatic approach to human practice—such as the practice of art production and art appreciation—involves accepting that the meaning of such practice occurs only in use, in the active encounter of human beings with the objects of their world. (It is the very emphasis on art in this schema that allows Douglas to distinguish "use" and "useful"; a use is made of art, but it is a noncommunicational, expressive, aesthetic one.)

In Douglas's pragmatism, nothing has meaning in and of itself but only insofar as it is inserted into a particular human situation. Douglas, though, insists that this pragmatism has nothing relativistic or subjectivist about it.

First, Douglas does not deny the existence of a physical world outside of any possible human reference to, or use made of, it. Douglas here makes a distinction between actuality—the world in its materiality—and the real—those aspects of the world that become humanly pertinent through human practice. In a nice example, Douglas suggests how Sherlock Holmes—although not actual in this physical universe—is easily Real, a figure who has become an integral part of many people's field of reference. As he puts it: "It is the real not the actual that impels people to act, since what is actual but fails to become real may as well not have happened except for the actual and real events it may have been a necessary condition of." (19)

Second, Douglas avoids subjectivism or solipsism by insisting on the necessarily shared and social nature of the Real: not all meanings are possible at all times because of culturally wide constraints. While Douglas does believe in the possibility of private experiences and even of private languages, he has a faith in verbalization and in dialogue as interactive forces that allow and even actively encourage transcendence of individual viewpoints. As he puts it: "This [pragmatism] is not, I stress, an abandonment of critical principles to the subjective, and of course the text is viable for all to see (though not from the same angle); what I am suggesting is that we air our private 'works' (or what Roman Ingarden called 'aesthetic objects') in intersubjective dialogue." (27)

Douglas's repeated reference to the phenomenologist Ingarden's notion of "aesthetic objects" serves several fuctions. First, it emphasizes that art is constructed in experience, not naturally out in the world. Second, as the reference to "intersubjective dialogue" suggests, it implies that even the most private of aesthetic experiences can be generalized through open discussion; here, Douglas makes explicit reference to the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas with his enlightenment faith in a rational communication that can overcome all divisions. Third, and in a way that also seeks to go beyond Habermas, the insistence on the aesthetic reminds us that some experiences (such as art) are not themselves rationally verbal, even if they can be the source for rational discussion. Art is always a problem for enlightenment-derived philosophies since it is not a purely communicative embodiment of calcu-

lable reasons. To take just one example, as Douglas shows, John M. Carroll's rationalist attempt (in *Toward a Structural Psychology of Cinema,* 1980) to outline a deep structure of film can do so only by intensely peremptory declarations about ungrammatical forms of film (which means, in practical terms, that he excludes much of modernist cinema from consideration).

The specificity of art, for Douglas, is defined by its ambiguity vis-à-vis all binary oppositions of communication/expression, purposeful/purposeless, referential/self-reflexive, and so on. Film is the paradigmatic art in its hovering between reference to this world and the imagination of other possible worlds. Like Peter Wollen in his influential *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969; rev. 1972), Douglas returns to Peirce's division of the sign into three types—icon, index, and symbol—and finds the essential importance of film to lie in its inevitable combination of the three. His obvious preference, then, goes to those films that blur boundaries, that defeat all simple logics of reading. Thus, for example, one of his most extended readings of an individual film centers on John Boorman's *Point Blank* (1967) where modernist technique subverts gangster-film conventions to such a degree that one can no longer be sure about chronology, about causality, about reality and imagination, or even about the existence of the central figure.

Film's deliberate confusing of boundaries even extends to the boundary between fictional world and audience, as Douglas suggests in readings of *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom.* Douglas's analysis of *Psycho,* in particular, shows how the formation of film into an imaginary signifier (à la Metz), safely viewed from a secure position, is undone by a play on identification that means that the audience is actively addressed by the film, even aggressed by it. If it is not easily an art of the imaginary or the real alone, neither is cinema simply an art of the imaginary or the symbolic alone: it plays between poles and puts the lie to all philosophic attempts to fix its meaning in one place.

One hates to be critical of a book put together with so much love, yet it is ironic to find Douglas's claim for open dialogue and public airing of views undone to a large degree by his own style and rhetoric. First of all, *Film and Meaning* is often distinguished by a highly polemical attitude in which Douglas substitutes for ongoing argument a series of instantaneous (and sometimes offputting) assertions. For example, in introducing a discussion of the ways films by Dreyer, Bresson, and Hitchcock create transcendental effects from the most worldly of actualities, Douglas notes in a throwaway line that transcendentalism in Dreyer and Bresson has already been discussed by Paul Schrader but concludes, "I think little more of [his book] than his films." (207–8)

But if the polemics come fast and furiously, so more generally do the very demonstrations of Douglas's points. *Film and Meaning* is a highly condensed book in which name after name, concept after concept, debate after debate come speeding nonstop through the pages. Quite frequently, Douglas will reduce a major philosophical question to little more than a one-sentence declaration of his own view of the matter; for a book that wants to show private languages becoming public, *Film and Meaning* often seems all too much a retreat into one person's unarticulated or undefended tastes. To take a typical example, Douglas ends an interesting (if hasty) discussion of the ways Nicholas Roeg films blend the imaginary and the actual (through, for example, the use of rock stars as actors, thereby adding an additional level of reference to the films) by announcing that "*Bad Timing* aims at the fictive, to give the story a generalized reference, but fails to be more than a bad fictive film. Perhaps I should say 'relatively bad,' since it succeeds in areas where most movies give up the attempt. It is only a bad Roeg, not altogether a bad film." (267) Even with the qualification he adds, what Douglas offers here is far from criticism-as-dialogue.

Finally, and most problematically, the polemical style and the condensation of argument go hand in hand with a larger problem: the book's ambiguous position between the two terms of its title. As the book's editor Horst Ruthrof himself notes, "The broad strategy employed in this book is to deal with theories of meaning in the earlier chapters, with a cursory mention of filmic material, while towards the end of the book detailed analyses of films take the center stage." Unfortunately, all too often, one has the sense that this strategy leads the book to split into two irreconcilable parts. It is equally difficult to imagine either the typical film scholar wading through the intricacy of the rapid discussions in the book's first parts of complicated debates in logic and language (for example, Frege, Wittgenstein, Quine, Chomsky, and so on and so on) or the typical philosopher knowing what

to make of the extended discussion of such areas of cinephilia as the various cuts of *Heaven's Gate* or the contemplative role of the long take in the horror films of Tobe Hooper.

At a moment when so much of contemporary philosophy is reaching out to an engagement with the lived experience of the everyday world and discovering along the way the inescapability of reflection on film (see, for example, Gilles Deleuze's two volumes on film), it is a shame that Ian Douglas's all too promising venture was forced, by the logic of its style and, more tragically, by fatal exigency, to stop short of its own full participation in the movement of ideas toward the world.

DANA POLAN

▪ Dana Polan is the editor of *Cinema Journal* and teaches at the University of Pittsburgh.

The Future of an Illusion
Film, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis

By Constance Penley. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989. $13.95

Constance Penley's *The Future Of An Illusion*, a collection of essays the majority of which originally appeared over the last thirteen years in *Screen* and *Camera Obscura*, ranges over a relatively wide area of cinematic terrain. Employing a mix of concepts derived from feminist theory and Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, Penley begins her book with essays on the English independent film-making and American avant-garde traditions. From there she moves on to a discussion of the importance of the concept of sexual difference to film theory, as well as to the idea of a "bachelor machine," "a closed self-sufficient [male] system," and a figure which ultimately applies to the camera as well. This is followed by a less than enthused pair of essays on Godard, the one a reading of Godard's *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* entitled "Pornography, Eroticism," the other on Godard's (in her view ultimately failed) experimental television work. Finally she discusses sexual difference in popular culture, choosing as candidates for what she sees as comparatively liberating forms of such culture James Cameron's *The Terminator* and "Pee Wee's PlayHouse," the television program. A concluding essay acknowledges some of the difficulties involved in squaring the sexist aspects of Freud with any form of consistent feminism.

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Her discussion of Godard is more interesting, though ultimately just as unsatisfying. While questions about desire, fantasy, representation, and sexual difference are raised by *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, according to Penley the film's male-centered masochism closes off all of these questions prematurely and "constructs the problem as essential, absolute and irreconcilable to the point of violence." When discussing Godard and Anne-Marie Mieville's twelve-part television series organized around interviews with two French schoolchildren, Penley perceptively points out that what is taking place between the off-screen interviewer and the children we see on the screen responding to the enigmatic questions they have been posed, is less an interview or conversation and more "a sort of Augustinian dialogue, full of puns, tricks and seemingly nonsensical questions that turn into logical traps." How-

to make of the extended discussion of such areas of cinephilia as the various cuts of *Heaven's Gate* or the contemplative role of the long take in the horror films of Tobe Hooper.

At a moment when so much of contemporary philosophy is reaching out to an engagement with the lived experience of the everyday world and discovering along the way the inescapability of reflection on film (see, for example, Gilles Deleuze's two volumes on film), it is a shame that Ian Douglas's all too promising venture was forced, by the logic of its style and, more tragically, by fatal exigency, to stop short of its own full participation in the movement of ideas toward the world.

DANA POLAN

▪ Dana Polan is the editor of *Cinema Journal* and teaches at the University of Pittsburgh.

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Film, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis

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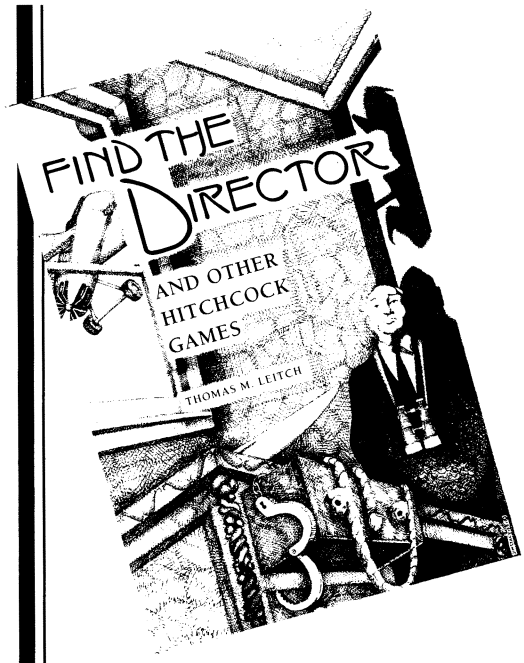
ever, the program's regular insinuation that "we are all monsters," including the freshly demythologized "children," for Penley is a kind of global critique which carries with it "the easy nihilism of its totalness." It is not clear whether or not Penley feels that the desire to totalize is by definition nihilistic, or rather, if it is simply a matter of Godard's going about it without the proper set of values.

In any case, I find her moral judgment on Godard's project, in which one of the work's many layers is taken to speak for the project as a whole, highly problematic, particularly when seen in the light of her evaluations of pop cultural items. In the course of her favorable treatment of James Cameron's *The Terminator*, an essay entitled "Time Travel, Primal Scene, and the Critical Dystopia" Penley asserts that "*The Terminator* goes beyond the flashy nihilism of apocalypse-for-the-sake-of-apocalypse to expose a more mundane logic of technological modernity"; moreover, she argues, the film successfully harnesses the power of "imaginary reminiscences." Penley's claim, then, an interesting and plausible one, is that *The Terminator*'s plot confronts the primal scene fantasy, the name Freud gave to the unconscious desire to witness parental intercourse, to be on the scene, as it were, for one's own conception. Yet in her fascination with this complex Penley fails to note that the plot of *The Terminator* treats the woman in the most reductive manner possible, as important only in terms of her birth-giving capacity, as a sort of cipher for reproduction, which more than cancels out any psychoanalytic yield the film may have to offer. It is ironic that Penley earlier faults Godard for too superficially emphasizing the primacy of the metaphor of duplication in his critique of the oppressive roles assigned to the "feminine sensibility"—over an image of a pregnant, naked secretary, a female narrator's voice that tells us that men condemn the majority of women to dictation, to copy-typing, to reproduction—when this metaphor functions so bluntly and so uncritically here. In this case then, the psychoanalytic reading actually obscures the feminist reading, as opposed to deepening it. At other points in the book, the two seem to simply follow their separate tracks. At no point in *The Future of an Illusion* do they combine to provide a coherent argument about cinema.

LEONARD SCHWARTZ

▪ Leonard Schwartz teaches at the Parsons School of Design and has published in *Afterimage, Harper's, Pequod,* and *Central Park.*



FIND THE DIRECTOR AND OTHER HITCHCOCK GAMES

Thomas M. Leitch

Developing a model of narrative based on game theory, Thomas M. Leitch offers a compelling new explanation for the distinctiveness and power of Hitchcock's films. Leitch contends that the director repeatedly redefines what it means to be a Hitchcock film in his gameplaying with the audience, and thus fosters a highly ambivalent attitude toward such concerns as the value of domesticity, the loss of identity, and the need for—and fear of—suspenseful apprehension. "Essential for collections interested in contemporary film/art theory, and an important addition to those concerned with the movies."—*Library Journal*
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Alien Zone

Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema

Edited by Annette Kuhn. New York: Verso, 1990. $17.95 paper

This anthology offers 18 essays on recent science fiction films and cultural theory. In general, the articles are broadly accessible and cogent. All but three have been previously published, primarily in periodical form dating from 1980 to the present. Four are shortened versions or are excerpted from larger articles. Kuhn's selection of essays emphasizes works of the eighties such as *Blade Runner*, *The Terminator*, *The Thing*, and *Videodrome*, but it is *Alien* that comes in for the most discussion. The limitation in variety of texts considered seems to be related to the book's overall feminist orientation.

Kuhn is more interested in what science fiction films do, in cultural terms—what she terms their cultural instrumentality—than in what these films are as isolated texts. The organization of the book into five sections, each preceded by an introduction (there is no index), is thus guided by different perspectives on cultural meaning. The essays in Part I consider science fiction cinema broadly as a form of sociological evidence. The last article in this section, Thomas Byers's "Commodity Futures," contrasts more progressive science fiction films such as *Alien* and *Blade Runner* with a more conservative one, *Star Trek II*. Byers oberves that in the trekker film, "Kirk and all he stands for—patriarchal white America, the sex-role division that approves the father's non-participation in the work of child-rearing, and the benign violence of proper authority—have been vindicated." (48)

The four essays in Part II reveal how certain films "speak, enact, even produce certain ideologies," while at the same time hiding these beliefs "under the cover of entertainment." Kuhn recognizes how these articles "are influenced in varying degrees by Marxism, feminism, or Althusserianism." (55) For example, James Kavanagh's "Feminism, Humanism and Science in *Alien*" is said to reveal a split between science and humanism that "in the end asserts a triumphant rebirth of humanism." (55) Kavanagh's complaisant approach is then contrasted with the one taken by Judith Newton in the article that follows. Newton's "Feminism and Anxiety in *Alien*" states that the main character Ripley is by the end of the film "not only divested of coalition and reinvested with femininity, she is also reaffirmed as Company Woman." (86) Thus Newton concludes that "*Alien* is another demonstration of how late capitalism, through its 'dominant cultural forms and practices . . . strains to sever social experience from the formation of counter ideologies' and to preempt the effects of association.' " (87)

Part III, "Repressions," is a particularly interesting collection of discussions on science fiction films as repositories of unconscious meanings. The tendency in films of this genre to bend traditional borders of space, time, and being encourages Vivian Sobchack, in her essay "The Virginity of Astronauts," to note associations between science fiction narrative and preoedipal experience. Like the indefinite boundaries between the primal self and the mother, the strange new worlds of science fiction film tend to destabilize perspective, notions of scale, distinctions between inside and outside, etc. While remarking the often repressed sexual discourse in the technological exploration of space in these films, Sobchack also notes the foregrounding of anxieties about identity, and the way in which such fears become focused around the vulnerable body. Similarly, the infant in its pre-oedipal state "has a tendency to introject or project maternal power, to see itself as powerful and potent and autonomous like the mother or to fear the other as monstrous, destructive and all-powerful." (114)

Barbara Creed's challenging essay, "*Alien* and the Monstrous-Feminine," shares in the view that the unconscious processes of the text work to repress and control the feminine. She explains that the traditional monstrous-feminine, like the creature in *Alien*, signifies only the oral-sadistic and the phallic mother. And this leads her to propose as a solution a consideration of the parthenogenetic, archaic mother, the mother-goddess, who gives birth to all living things. Creed criticizes Freud, Lacan, and Julia Kristeva for overlooking the archaic mother and mystifying the figure of woman. But in her effort to get around the oppressive, dyadic, patriarchal logic of the phallus, one wonders why Creed is so willing to accept its terms, to conflate the pre-oedipal with the oedipal mother, the oral with the sadistic, the sexually undifferentiated stage of infancy with the later sex-differentiated, and the

notion of fetishism only with the woman's "lack." Because Creed sees the pre-oedipal mother as already enclosed within the patriarchal family constellation, she denies the realm of the earthly maternal and the symbolic altogether. This closes off other possibilities—such as the importance of the pre-oedipal mother (not Freud's phallic mother supposedly imagined by the infant) and of the oral stage as a period of fluid, polymorphous sexuality —and shifts the discussion from the level of the family-social to the mythological. It is difficult to see how this otherworldly mother-goddess can be a solution to the repudiation of the maternal in the patriarchal ideology apparent in the films under consideration.

The book's fourth section, on spectatorship, considers questions of narrative viewpoint, the film apparatus, and the role of the reader. Steve Neale's essay on special effects focuses on the spectator's suspension of disbelief and the process of learning and making judgements. J. P. Telotte's "The Doubles of Fantasy and the Space of Desire" locates the pleasures of spectatorship in the mimetic quality of androids, cyborgs, and replicants, which also reflect on the issues of representation and fantasy in cinema generally.

The closing section addresses intertextuality, a very appropriate concern in genre film, especially if one considers the many cross-generic products of recent years. Science fiction films afford excellent opportunities to observe the "textualizing" of the social, the way in which Jean Baudrillard's concept of the insistent simulacra overwhelm representation and displace or evacuate the real. As Kuhn explains, "Contemporary science fiction cinema has been hailed as a privileged cultural site for enactments of the postmodern condition—usually in its more nightmarish aspects." (178) Kuhn distinguishes between film texts *about* postmodernism, such as *Blade Runner* (treated effectively by Giuliana Bruno), and texts *of* postmodernism, that actually produce rather than signify the postmodern condition.

Scott Bukatman's energetic essay, "Who Programs You? The Science Fiction of the Spectacle," takes up *Videodrome* (1982) as an example of a science fiction horror film that "provides no stable viewpoint from which to judge what is 'really' happening in the story," where "the image itself constantly proves unreliable," (179) and "distinctions between hallucination and reality break down." (180) By quoting Alvin Toffler, Baudrillard, Arthur Kroker, McLuhan, Marcuse, Guy Dubord, William S. Burroughs, Philip K. Dick, Eric Mottram, and Christopher Sharrett, and putting them all in a kind of conference call eventually focused on Bukatman's analysis of David Cronenberg's films and *Videodrome* in particular, he manages a compelling compression of postmodern theory and textual analysis.

Kuhn concludes her selection of essays with Anne Cranny-Francis's feminist overview of the genre, "Feminist Futures: A Generic Study." This article finds hope in the "collapse of the categories human and machine," (226) and of phallocentrism, through an aesthetic of reception and a politics based in "affinity, not identity." Cranny-Francis wants to believe "in a film practice which would be characterized by a play across a matrix of surfaces: pleasures and politics as interplay, the flip-flop of the integrated circuit constituting the transgressive communication of a diverse—and yet inclusive—feminist positioning." (227)

This longed-for transgressive pervasion by "a diverse and yet inclusive feminist positioning" implies that basic power relations will be transformed for the better through a feminist displacement of patriarchy, through an awakening to those marginal "alien zones" of culture that have been oppressed and repressed. Meanwhile, the postmodernists' concerns that the sign culture already has become a post-dialectical spectacle, which hides the absence of *all* subjectivity and meaning, remains an ultimate alien zone to which cultural practice and theory must finally address itself.

This clearly written anthology, while it doesn't seek to be all-inclusive in its treatment of science fiction films of the eighties, serves to help organize and in some cases advance pertinent theoretical and critical concerns with subjectivity, gender, and cultural positioning. However, such an increasingly significant genre still deserves and awaits a more comprehensive up-dating which would include more on issues of generic conflation, of the psychological-ideological interface (cognition theory with a greater concern for affect, for example), and of body subjectivity in hypermediated, dystopic environments of exhaustion and decline. Vivian Sobchack's *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* remains the primary resource in this genre. Collections such as *Alien Zone* that focus on one generic decade need to be complemented by ad-

ditional work that goes to the essence of Western cultural history in relation to the changing imaginative worlds of science fiction cinema.

JACK BOOZER, JR.

▪ Jack Boozer, Jr., teaches at Georgia State University in Atlanta.

Miscellaneous

Altman, Mark A. *Twin Peaks Behind-the-Scenes: An Unofficial Visitor's Guide to Twin Peaks.* This badly typeset but otherwise quite useful book is chock full of data about the David Lynch TV series, which will no doubt be the subject of not only *Twin Peaks* conventions, as the book suggests, but also a half a hundred doctoral theses, for which this volume will provide much useful ballast. Cast and crew interviews, magazine covers, script extracts, cherry-pie recipes (just kidding, although they would not be alien to the book's buffish tone). Most useful feature: detailed credits and plot synopses for every episode of the show through the resolution of the Laura Palmer mystery.

GREGG RICKMAN

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terviews with extras, visits to locations, etc. There's meat here as well for Ford scholars on the director's feuds with Republic Studio's Herbert Yates.

GREGG RICKMAN

Metz, Christian. *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990. A reprint of the 1974 edition, with a note on translation problems by Bertrand Augst.

Naylor, David. *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy*. New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991. $19.95 papèr. Reissue of the 1981 work. Splendid photos, some in color. E. C.

Richards, Jeffrey. *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in Britain, 1930–39*. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1990. $18.95 paper. Reissue of the 1984 work.

Walton, Kendall L. *Mimesis as Make-Believe*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990. $35.00. Walton's argument construes representational art to be contiguous with childhood make-believe, always serious, never without an element of play, we—the audience—willing players. The props of any fictional mode generate the substance of our fantasy and the conditions of its extensions: how far a painting goes beyond its frame, whether Tolstoy's Napoleon speaks in Russian or French, why Julie Harris as Emily Dickinson is allowed to talk so incessantly. Nelson Goodman's studies on literature and art seem to underlie much of the material on representation. Walton draws from Richard Wolheim's work on depictive systems. Wayne Booth's "third-person center of consciousness" and Seymour Chatman's *Story and Discourse* appear in a section on narrative discourse, although here as elsewhere Walton's preoccupations with the ramifications of "Fiction" as operative language delimits the scope of his inquiry. He draws on several examples from film, but the citations constantly reappear. They're used not to illuminate works but to refine the book's argument. The author is a philosophy professor; he writes with remarkable clarity and pursues the finest of distinctions. Wittgenstein appears now and again, Derrida not at all.

JOHN FELL

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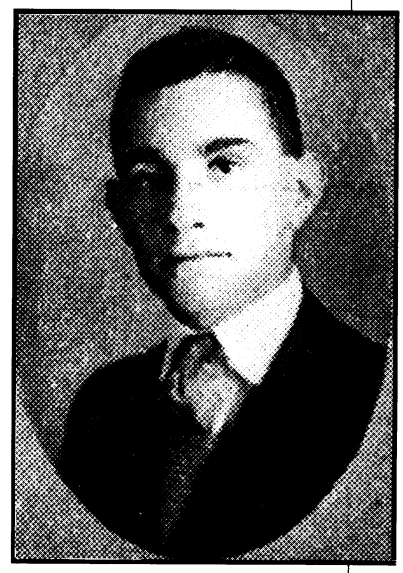

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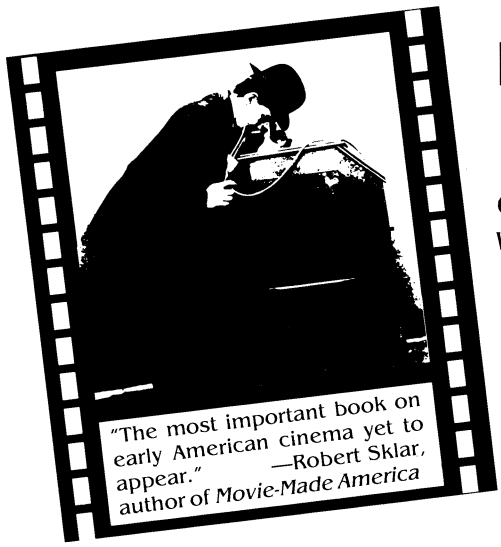

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